

HUMOR BY IAN FRAZIER / FICTION BY COLUM McCANN

The Atlantic Monthly

JULY 1998

MEXICO AND THE SOUTHWEST

Travels Into America's Future

by Robert D. Kaplan

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77 NORTH WASHINGTON STREET

THREE years ago in *The Atlantic Monthly*, Eric Schlosser reported on the plight of farm workers employed by California's strawberry industry. "In the Strawberry Fields" (November, 1995), which was a finalist for the National Magazine Award for reporting, described the workings of an industry that relied largely on an imported peasantry at harvest, that offered some of the lowest wages in the United States, and that profited from cruel sharecropping arrangements.

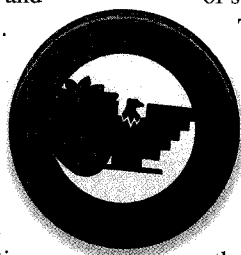
The living and working conditions in that industry have scarcely improved since then. Its workers remain among the most impoverished in the nation. Rulings by the California Supreme Court have tried to limit the ability of growers to trap farm workers in exploitative sharecropping schemes. But a variety of factors have allowed growers to continue business as usual.

Following the publication of Schlosser's article, the United Farm Workers decided to launch its first major organizing drive among California's strawberry workers. The aim is to hold elections in the near future. The organizing drive is the UFW's largest in a generation, and it has received strong backing from the AFL-CIO. After years of declining membership, the UFW has recently won contracts in California's let-

tuce, rose, mushroom, and wine industries. The union's economic demands are rather modest. The UFW wants strawberry workers to receive contracts (at the moment, they are employed on a day-to-day basis), a decent wage, and health benefits. Increasing the cost of a pint of strawberries by just one nickel, the UFW argues, could raise the piece-rate wages of strawberry workers by as much as 50 percent.

The UFW campaign is fiercely opposed by the strawberry industry. In the past growers have plowed their fields under and fired all their workers rather than negotiate. Growers have recently created phony farm-worker organizations to sow confusion, have dismissed workers who express sympathy for the UFW, and have threatened to shut down operations if the union is endorsed. Tensions are running high in Watsonville and Salinas, the focuses of the UFW campaign.

This year marks the thirtieth anniversary of the twenty-five-day hunger strike and grape boycott organized by Cesar Chavez which first brought the UFW to national prominence. In recent years the hardships faced by the nation's farm workers have received little attention. The UFW hopes that events in Watsonville and Salinas will mark a turning point in its organizing drive. —THE EDITORS



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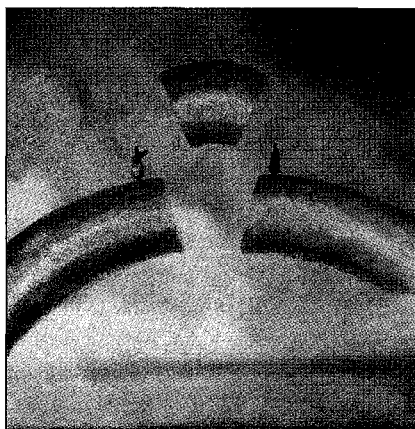
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LETTERS

Biology and Morality

Edward O. Wilson's "The Biological Basis of Morality" (April *Atlantic*) is in many ways generous, sensitive, and challenging. But it seems to me that it is also absolutely bristling with difficulties. For one thing, Wilson's summaries of religious and theological history descend repeatedly into painful caricature. His reduction of religious ethics to theories about natural law treats the far more fundamental tradition of biblical relational and covenantal ethics—found in the classical prophets Jesus and Paul up to writers like Kierkegaard, Buber, Tillich, and Reinhold Niebuhr—as if it didn't exist, and that betrays his basic juxtaposition of transcendentalism and empiricism into the fallacy of the false alternative. For another thing, it seems to me also that he has simply not understood the force of Kant's argument that (as applied to Wilson's defense of "objective" science) the human self cannot be understood without remainder as rooted in the objective natural world we can know empirically, because the world of objects known to empiricism has, by eliminating the possibility methodologically, no place for the *subject* that knows such a world. This means that if in fact it can be shown empirically that we are given to certain socially accredited "moral instincts," as free moral intelligences we are still faced with whether we *ought* to conform to them—or to which of competing ones. For ethics is about not what we want or are pressured or programmed to do but what we ought to do. The expression "moral instinct" is an oxymoron!

And Wilson's effort to contrast empiricism and transcendentalism in the way he does seems to me to be based on a great misunderstanding. He believes that religion and natural science are fundamentally different—the one grounded in "ambiguous" "idioms of theology

and philosophy," the other in solid "objective knowledge." But I submit that the juxtaposition he describes is not between religion and science but between two *religions*. To say that the methods of empirical science are one way to understand reality is one thing, but to say they are the only way is quite another. That's not science anymore, for one can't know empirically that the only source of knowledge is empirical. That's *scientism*. And as an ism, it plays for Wilson exactly the same interpretive role as religion. He complains that transcendental ethics begins with moral principles presumed to be self-evident, yet he begins with an epistemological principle that *he* presumes to be self-evident: empiricism—a "free-standing assumption" if ever there was one. Why is his faith any less "blind" than the religious faith he eschews?

The wonder of Wilson's disparaging outline of "The Origins of Religion," about how a religion will begin as a cult, increase in power to achieve tolerance outside the circle of believers, organize itself around a central myth that explains "how the chosen people—those subscribing to the belief system—arrived at its center," and then develop a set of "instructions and formulas . . . available to members who have worked their way to a higher state of enlightenment," is that it would seem to apply so perfectly to his scientism.

Stanley R. Moore
Claremont, Calif.

I fully agree with Edward O. Wilson's essential point that there is a biological basis to morality and human nature. However, I think that his focus on transcendentalism versus empiricism diminishes his overall argument. Two statements from the essay illustrate what I'm driving at: "The essence of humanity's spiritual dilemma is that we evolved genetically to accept one truth and discovered another"; and, in discussing the



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need to scientifically probe the biological basis of moral sentiments, "From that knowledge it should be possible to adapt ancient moral sentiments more wisely to the swiftly changing conditions of modern life into which . . . we have plunged." In other words, we are psychologically maladapted to life in our current environment.

That is the crux of the problem. *Modern* human beings lived for approximately 200,000 years in small hunter-gatherer bands. Pre-modern human beings lived similarly for *at least* two million years. Only in the past 10,000 years has our human lifestyle significantly changed. In this evolutionarily short time span occurred the transformation from small-scale, nomadic, relatively egalitarian, kin-based foraging societies to large-scale, sedentary, hierarchical, agricultural-industrial societies composed of distantly related individuals. In the process some of our "prehistoric" evolved behaviors were distorted and/or perverted. Thus sexually selected male behaviors, which subconsciously promote a drive for prestige and status, became the moti-

vation for pillage, conquest, wealth-hoarding, enslavement, and female subjugation as settlements grew in size and some form of order was needed to maintain cohesion.

Moral precepts have undoubtedly been with us longer than the written record. But ethical principles probably did not come about until the process of societal transformation began. The problem lies not with our ethical principles but with the phenomenon of class-based, male-dominated hierarchical societies whose rulers must justify the inequities they maintain.

Marc Beallor
North Canton, Ohio

Edward O. Wilson placates religious sensibilities by declaiming not once but twice that accepting the biological basis for religious beliefs does not make them untrue. The religious (oceanic, cosmological) emotion is one thing. Our feeling of awe at the totality of existence probably is a foundation of morality, since it carries us to an experiential priority beyond ourselves. Wilson rightly

concerns himself with the compulsion of this feeling. Religious beliefs, however, as Wilson indicates, have been merely ill-informed hypotheses. Wilson's article seems to replace superstition with science in this heretofore neglected domain.

Certainly most religious beliefs have by now been proved decidedly untrue. Those that have not are all in contention, and must therefore be mostly false too. For instance, if there's only one God, there can't be many. If we go to Heaven when we die, we can't be reincarnated. If communal dancing on the prairie brings rain, then the target of prayer is relative. If Jews are God's favorite people, then Jehovah's Witnesses are not. If Mohammed supersedes Jesus, then Christ is not the main son of God. And so on. When faced with the plethora of contradictory religious convictions and the historical record that religious beliefs have overwhelmingly been exposed as superstitious fictions, it is irrational to state that remaining religious beliefs might be true.

Surely, in the old college spirit that



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you can't prove a negative, nothing Wilson suggests proves that religious beliefs are untrue. But the likely probability that any are true is on the order of the odds that all the molecules in a room will randomly converge into a corner. In the laws of quantum physics this, too, is possible, but it's not happening.

Mark Vlosky
Broomfield, Colo.

Edward O. Wilson manages to give a pretty fair explication of the sociobiological take on ethics while tiptoeing around the theory's main problem. If ethical commands are merely biological or cultural dictates, then they cease to be moral imperatives, and a rent in the moral fabric becomes merely a glitch in the evolutionary design. To see how foolish this is, ask any parents of a murdered child if their feelings about the child's murder can be explained away as a genetic by-product. Chances are you won't even ask the question. Shame will stop you.

To be fair to Wilson, he does try to replace some of the moral seriousness

his theory necessarily jettisons. The results, however, are laughable, especially when we try to apply to Wilson's statements those standards implicit in a scientific view. Take, for example, the sentence "The true evolutionary epic, retold as poetry, is as intrinsically ennobling as any religious epic." Where is the proof of that? What could *ever* count as evidence that such a statement is right or wrong? Equally bad is the next sentence: "Material reality discovered by science already possesses more content and grandeur than all religious cosmologies combined." Does Wilson have a grandeur meter? Statements like these can't even *be* true or false. They're nonsense.

In a nutshell, the real problem is that Wilson can't have it both ways. Kant was right. If you want to preserve a realm of moral earnestness, you have to keep it free from the encroachments of science. If you take the other path and say good-bye to an independent moral realm, you say good-bye to it for good.

Mark Gray
Seattle, Wash.

Single-Sex Schools

In "The Trouble With Single-Sex Schools" (April *Atlantic*), Wendy Kaminer is quite right to point out the danger of justifying single-sex education for girls and women in ways that perpetuate gender stereotypes. What she fails to note, however, is that girls' schools and women's colleges are not supported exclusively by people who believe that females think differently or learn differently or speak differently from males. They are supported by people who believe that such institutions play a major and effective role in advancing the interests of girls and women in a world in which true gender equity has yet to be achieved.

Not all girls' schools and women's colleges are alike; not all have the same mission or offer the same rationale for their existence. No one would treat co-educational schools and colleges in as oversimplified and superficial a manner as Kaminer treats single-sex institutions.

Kaminer asserts that separating the sexes itself reinforces gender stereo-



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types. But arguing, as she does, on general principles, one could make exactly the opposite case: that boys and girls, women and men, are most likely to perform their gender roles in the presence of each other. After all, roles are played for an audience. The actual realities of gender performance are, of course, more complex than either of these generalizations.

The basic problem with Kaminer's discussion is that it takes place in an abstract bubble that no actual social realities seem to penetrate. The Young Women's Leadership School, in East Harlem, and the Virginia Military Institute are simply lumped together as single-sex institutions, though one is a small experimental program for disadvantaged African-American and Latina girls, and the other has been a traditional bastion of southern male privilege where generations of young men have been socialized into their gender roles through rituals of misogyny. (If girls at the East Harlem school are ridiculed by being called "boys" when they fail to perform well in class, I have yet to hear about it.) Kaminer compares the "discrimination" practiced by girls' schools and women's colleges to the bad old days of racially segregated schools. But can she really believe that men are discriminated against by not being able to attend Barnard (with Columbia across the street) or Wellesley (with MIT and Harvard just down the road a piece) in the same way that black Americans were discriminated against by not being able to attend white schools in the era of segregation?

Kaminer's own values are not exactly clear. She first attacks women's colleges for being elitist and then denigrates them for losing top-flight female talent to the coed Ivies. The fact is that women's colleges continue to attract exceptionally bright and highly qualified applicants. At the same time, like other liberal-arts colleges, they make an enormous commitment to financial aid, which means that a large proportion of their students come from backgrounds of economic deprivation. Many are the first in their families to attend college; many are the daughters of recent immigrants; many are older women pursuing their education part-time as they meet other life responsibilities.

Kaminer argues—illogically, I be-

lieve—that we should support single-sex education only if we are prepared to give up on the project of achieving gender equity in coeducational schools. Some of us have had no problem working for gender equity in coeducational settings while at the same time supporting girls' schools and women's colleges, which are hardly the likeliest targets for feminist concern.

Judith Shapiro

*President
Barnard College
New York, N.Y.*

In her recent article Wendy Kaminer calls all-female schools "models of equivocation" because they have "fostered femininity along with feminism." Is it the problem of all-girls schools that we live in a society that implies we must decide between the two? If we did not live in a culture that values hunting over gathering, that venerates and rewards traditionally male jobs and professions at the expense of the work women have done through the ages, would we have to choose between being feminine and supporting the advancement of women?

There are two ways to address the fact that men and women do not share power and economic rewards equally. The first is to open the doors of the corridors of power to women—to be sure that we are training our daughters to be doctors and lawyers and athletes and astronauts. We have no trouble with this one. The second is to recognize that the work that women have traditionally done is important work. This is the one that we approach sheepishly. We have to apologize for choosing to stay home to raise children, for having time to cook, for being a kindergarten teacher rather than an engineer, for being—heaven forbid—feminine.

In doing so we send an interesting cross message to our daughters. We celebrate them, as we should, when they win at a science fair, get an athletic scholarship to college, or become a computer scientist—in short, when they are doing what twenty-five years ago would have been done only by men. Are we as eager to praise our sons who announce that they plan to eschew the baseball team to work at a local day-care center? We accept traditionally male work as the im-

portant work; we teach our daughters to aspire to it exclusively; and then we wonder what happens to their self-esteem.

What Kaminer sees as equivocation in single-sex schools, I see as balance. Educating our daughters well today requires a remarkable juggling act. We do have to "facilitate their entry into the professions," but it is no less important to remind them that the work women have traditionally done, merely preserving and transmitting our culture, is important work.

As a teacher of mathematics, I see it as critically important that my students are well trained and at ease with my subject; for twenty-five years I have committed myself to swelling the ranks of scientists, engineers, and computer scientists with my female students. But I am careful to tell them, and to remind myself, that as much as my girls need mathematics, mathematics needs them more. They bring to the study of the subject an important perspective; they are interested in connecting. My all-girls classes have challenged me to connect mathematics to other disciplines, to the good of the world and to the betterment of others, rather than studying it in a vacuum. We have all come to understand not that they can do mathematics in spite of these traditionally feminine concerns but that they will do better mathematics because of them.

I do not think we will ever be successful in our quest for equity by androgyny. The problem is not that sex differences are "regressive notions" but that we persist in valuing only male models.

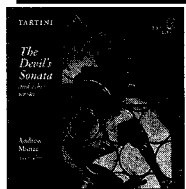
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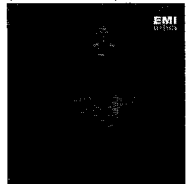
Based on my sister's experience at a private women's college, I must agree with Wendy Kaminer's article. When I visited my sister at school not long ago, I expected to see classes full of women who contributed confidently to discussions, free from the fear that male voices would drown them out.

Instead I discovered relatively silent classrooms full of reticent students. I also found a school that offered few advanced math or science courses, specializing instead in the more stereotypically "female" fields of the humanities and the

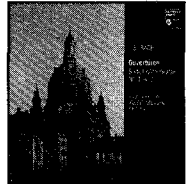
CLASSICAL MASTERPIECES



Tartini: The Devil's Sonata Andrew Manze (Harmonia Mundi) **239-343**



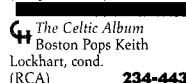
Roberto Alagna: Verdi Arias Abbado, cond. (EMI Classics) **238-964**



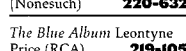
Bach: Orchestral Suites 1 & 3 Academy Of Ancient Music Berlin (Harmonia Mundi) **237-479**



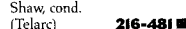
Murray Perahia Plays Handel & Scarlatti (Sony Classical) **183-558**



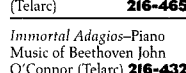
The Celtic Album Boston Pops Keith Lockhart, cond. (RCA) **234-443**



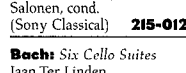
Kronos Quartet- Early Music (Nonesuch) **220-632**



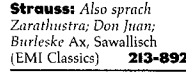
The Blue Album Leontyne Price (RCA) **219-105**



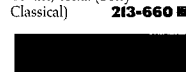
Handel: Messiah Atlanta Sym. & Chorus, Robert Shaw, cond. (Telarc) **216-481**



Rossini: Overtures Atlanta Sym., Levi, cond. (Telarc) **216-465**



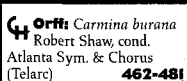
Immortal Adagios-Piano Music of Beethoven John O'Connor (Telarc) **216-432**



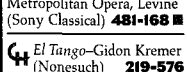
Schoenberg: Transfigured Night; more Salonen, cond. (Sony Classical) **215-012**



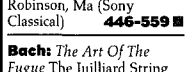
Bach: Six Cello Suites Jaap Ter Linden (Harmonia Mundi) **213-900**



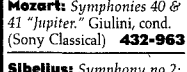
Orff: Carmina burana Robert Shaw, cond. Atlanta Sym. & Chorus (Telarc) **462-481**



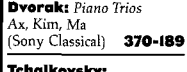
Verdi: Il Trovatore Domingo, Millo, Zajick, Metropolitan Opera, Levine (Sony Classical) **481-168**



El Tango-Gidon Kremer (Nonesuch) **219-576**



Brahms String Sextets Stern, Lin, Laredo, Tree, Robinson, Ma (Sony Classical) **446-559**



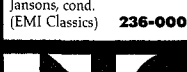
Bach: The Art Of The Fugue The Juilliard String Quartet (Sony Classical) **439-422**



Mozart: Symphonies 40 & 41 "Jupiter." Giulini, cond. (Sony Classical) **432-963**



Sibelius: Symphony no 2: Finlandia Mehta, cond. (Teldec) **419-820**



Dvorak: Piano Trios Ax, Kim, Ma (Sony Classical) **370-189**



Tchaikovsky: Piano Concerto no 1 Barry Douglas, Slatkin, cond. (RCA) **189-647**



Sibelius & Mendelssohn: Violin Concertos Sarah Chang, Jansons, cond. (EMI Classics) **236-000**



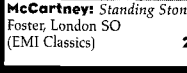
Vivaldi, Handel, Bach, & Carollan: The Harp Consort (Deutsche Harmonia Mundi) **233-106**



Italian Concerto—Vivaldi, Handel, Bach, & Carollan The Harp Consort (Deutsche Harmonia Mundi) **233-106**



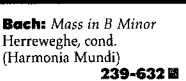
Beethoven: Triple Concerto; Brahms: Double Concerto; Oistrakh, Rostropovich Richter, Karajan, Szell (EMI Classics) **227-686**



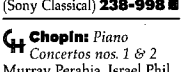
Beethoven: Double Concerto; Oistrakh, Rostropovich Richter, Karajan, Szell (EMI Classics) **227-686**



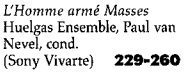
Perusio: Virelais, Ballades, Caccia Huelgas Ensemble Paul van Nevel, cond. (Sony Classical) **234-468**



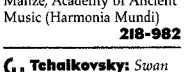
Bach: Mass in B Minor Herreweghe, cond. (Harmonia Mundi) **239-632**



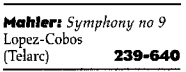
Mahler: Symphony no 3 LA Phil, Salonen, cond. (Sony Classical) **238-998**



Chopin: Piano Concertos nos. 1 & 2 Murray Perahia, Israel Phil., Mehta, cond. (Sony Classical) **403-337**



L'Homme armé Masses Huelgas Ensemble, Paul van Nevel, cond. (Sony Vivarte) **229-260**



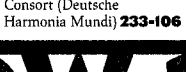
Bach: Violin Concertos Andrew Manze, Academy of Ancient Music (Harmonia Mundi) **218-982**



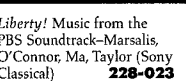
Tchaikovsky: Swan Lake & Sleeping Beauty Ballet Suites Muti, cond. (EMI Classics) **334-680**



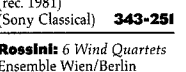
Mahler: Symphony no 9 Lopez-Cobos (Telarc) **239-640**



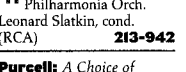
Tan Dun: Symphony 1997 Yo-Yo Ma, et al. (Sony Classical) **220-384**



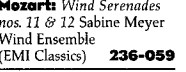
Liberty! Music from the PBS Soundtrack—Marsalis, O'Connor, Ma, Taylor (Sony Classical) **228-023**



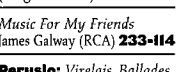
Bach: Goldberg Variations Glenn Gould (rec. 1981) (Sony Classical) **343-251**



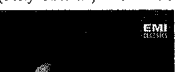
Rossini: 6 Wind Quartets Ensemble Wien/Berlin (Sony Classical) **229-211**



Holst: The Planets Philharmonia Orch. Leonard Slatkin, cond. (RCA) **213-942**



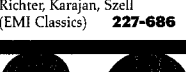
Purcell: A Choice of Lessons Olivier Baumont (Erato) **236-224**



Mozart: Wind Serenades nos. 11 & 12 Sabine Meyer Wind Ensemble (EMI Classics) **236-059**



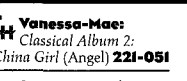
Rameau: Pieces De Clavecin Trio Sonnerie (Virgin Veritas) **236-018**



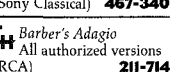
Music For My Friends James Galway (RCA) **233-114**



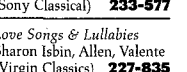
Perusio: Virelais, Ballades, Caccia Huelgas Ensemble Paul van Nevel, cond. (Sony Classical) **234-468**



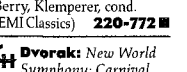
Vanessa-Mae: Classical Album 2: China Girl (Angel) **221-051**



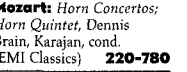
Brahms: Sonatas for Piano & Violin Stern, Bronfman (Sony Classical) **467-340**



Barber's Adagio All authorized versions (RCA) **211-714**



My Secret Passion: Opera Arias Michael Bolton (Sony Classical) **233-577**



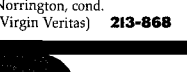
Love Songs & Lullabies Sharon Isbin, Allen, Valente (Virgin Classics) **227-835**



Beethoven: Fidelio Ludwig, Vickers, Frick, Berry, Klemperer, cond. (EMI Classics) **220-772**



Dvorak: New World Symphony: Carnival Ov. LA Phil, Previn, cond. (Telarc) **235-606**



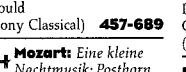
Mozart: Horn Concertos; Horn Quintet, Dennis Brain, Karajan, cond. (EMI Classics) **220-780**



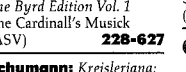
Maria Callas-Lyric & Coloratura Arias Serafin (EMI Classics) **233-585**



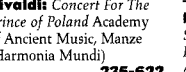
Puccini: Tosca Callas, di Stefano, Gobbi, de Sabata (EMI Classics) **220-442**



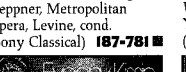
Bach: Two- And Three-part Inventions Glenn Gould (Sony Classical) **457-689**



Mozart: Eine kleine Nachtmusik; Posthorn Serenade Mackerras, cond. (Telarc) **178-210**



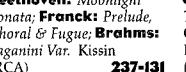
The Byrd Edition Vol. 1 The Cardinal's Musick (ASV) **228-627**



Schumann: Kreisleriana; Sonata no 1 M. Perahia (Sony Classical) **228-056**



Vivaldi: Concert For The Prince of Poland Academy of Ancient Music, Manze (Harmonia Mundi) **235-622**



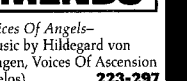
Wagner: The Flying Dutchman Morris, Voigt, Heppner, Metropolitan Opera, Levine, cond. (Sony Classical) **187-781**



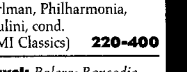
Beethoven: Moonlight Sonata; Franck: Prelude, Choral & Fugue; Brahms: Paganini Var. Kissin (RCA) **237-131**



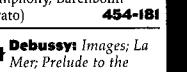
Copland: The Music Of America Cincinnati Pops Erich Kunzel, cond. (Telarc) **178-384**



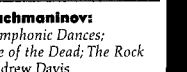
Voices Of Angels—Music by Hildegard von Bingen, Voices Of Ascension (Delos) **223-297**



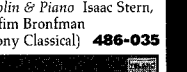
Beethoven: Violin Concerto Itzhak Perlman, Philharmonia, Giulini, cond. (EMI Classics) **220-400**



Ravel: Bolero; Rapsodie espagnole; Pavane for a Dead Princess Chicago Symphony, Barenboim (Erato) **454-181**



Debussy: Images; La Mer; Prelude to the Afternoon... LA Phil., Salonen, cond. (Sony Classical) **178-004**



Rachmaninov: Symphonic Dances; Isle of the Dead; The Rock Andrew Davis (Finlandia) **232-256**



Mozart: 3 Sonatas For Violin & Piano Isaac Stern, Yefim Bronfman (Sony Classical) **486-035**

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for Solo Violin
M. Huggert
(Virgin Veritas) **239-129**

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Van Cliburn, Leinsdorf
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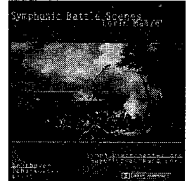
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Stoltzman, Ma
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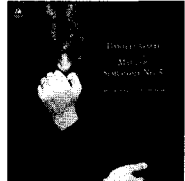
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Laredo, Robinson, Ma
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Sonatas London Baroque
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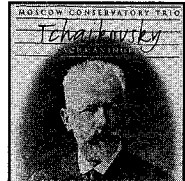
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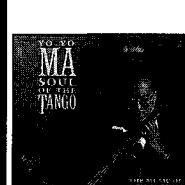
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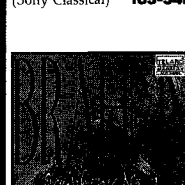
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social sciences. In addition, the older students seemed most concerned with "catching" men who attended the nearby all-male military academy.

In general my sister's college sparked less classroom participation by women, allowed fewer options to excel in non-traditional areas, and provided fewer intellectual contacts between men and women than did the private coeducational university I attended. I must agree with Kaminer that attractive as is the promise of single-sex schools, coeducational schools serve students better.

Elizabeth C. Feil
Sacramento, Calif.

Wendy Kaminer replies:

I don't recognize my article from Judith Shapiro's angry, inaccurate description of it. A reader of her letter would never know that much of my article was devoted to discussing social-science evidence regarding the benefits of single-sex schools for young women and girls (the studies are inconclusive) or that I focused on the question that Shapiro claims I ignored: Do exclusively female schools foster achievement and advance equality?

I don't share popular feminist beliefs in the value of single-sex education, but I did not ignore or misrepresent them. For example, I did not "lump together" the Young Women's Leadership School, in East Harlem, with all-male military institutions like VMI and the Citadel. Instead I made Shapiro's point: I explained that supporters of the East Harlem school perceive it as a kind of affirmative action for lower-income minority students who suffer discrimination in coed classrooms. I stressed that the school is "intended to prepare girls for colleges and careers."

I did not compare elite female secondary schools and colleges to impoverished, racially segregated public schools. I did suggest that constitutional principles prohibiting racial segregation should apply to sexual segregation as well. I did not even imply that male students at Columbia are disadvantaged by Barnard's exclusionary admission policies. I did point out that low-income minority males and females are both at risk, and I questioned whether establishing high-quality public schools for lower-income girls and not lower-income

boys was an appropriate exercise in affirmative action.

I did not and would not denigrate the Seven Sisters for losing the best-credentialed students to the Ivy League. (And I don't equate credentials with intelligence or talent.) I simply reported a predictable trend, shaped by the apparent preferences of female high school seniors, only three percent of whom even consider attending single-sex schools.

Advice & Consent

The following is offered as an update on the recent discussion in these pages concerning the origins of the term *First Lady* (Word Improvisation, October, 1997, *Atlantic*; Letters, January and April *Atlantics*):

In a letter dated January 20, 1878, the Washington journalist Emily Edson Briggs (1830-1910) appealed to Lucy Webb Hayes, "as our *first lady*," to publicly "approve the progress of woman on the high road of civilization." Elsewhere, describing an 1871 presidential reception, Briggs identified Julia Dent Grant as "the *first lady*." Briggs clearly played a hitherto unappreciated role in helping to establish the phrase *first lady* in White House reporting. Undoubtedly she was not alone, but these appear to be the earliest occurrences of *first lady* yet documented.

Special thanks to the *Oxford English Dictionary* researcher David Shulman (who pushed the date of the original phrase, "first lady in the land," back to 1834) and, for Briggs's letter, to Nan J. Card, the curator of manuscripts at the Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Center, in Fremont, Ohio.

J. E. Lighter
Knoxville, Tenn.

Peter Schrag ("California, Here We Come," March *Atlantic*) shows his true political colors when he dismisses as "facile" Ronald Reagan's identification of the main problem in confronting domestic policy—an enormous, abusive, and out-of-control government. What is truly facile is Schrag's belief in the virtue of an unchecked and well-funded legislature.

William A. Fedders
Chicago, Ill.

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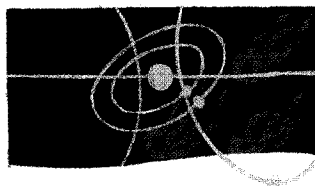
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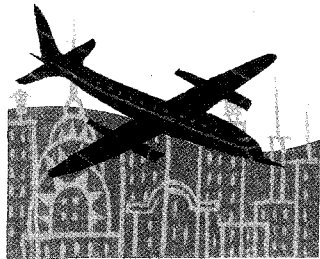
Health & Safety

Although cold and flu season is months away, the transmission of another type of virus peaks during July and August: computer viruses. The chief vectors are teenagers and children, who have more time to spend on computers during summer vacation than during the school year. Infection rates have soared since 1995, owing to a new family of viruses called macro viruses (macros are small programs embedded in electronic documents), coupled with the burgeoning of E-mail communication. Although macro viruses account for only about 2,100 of the more than 16,000 known viruses, they are responsible for approximately 80 percent of new infections. As with human disease, prevention is the best medicine: experts recommend backing up files often, running anti-virus software at all times, and frequently updating protection programs. If these measures fail, take two aspirins and call the computer's doctor.



The Skies

July 6: The waxing Moon lies just above the summer constellation Scorpius in the evening sky. 9: Full Moon, also known this month as the Thunder, Hay, or Buck Moon. The days ahead bring several notable conjunctions, in the hour before dawn, of the Moon and various planets: Jupiter on the 15th, Saturn on the 17th, and Mars and Venus on the 21st. July 28: the Delta Aquarid meteor shower peaks tonight. Although often less showy than August's Perseids, the Delta Aquarids this year, unlike the Perseids, will be free from the Moon's interference for most of the night.

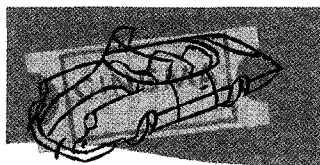


Government

July 14: Today the Federal Aviation Administration begins a redesign of air-traffic routes over the New York City area—the first step in an unprecedented effort to overhaul air routes nationwide. Newark, La Guardia, and Kennedy Airports together handle nearly 5,000 flights a day and are ranked one, six, and 12, respectively, among airports with the worst delays. The nationwide effort, which is aimed at reducing both delays and noise, is expected to take several years and cost some \$300 million. 17: Russia's last Czar, Nicholas II, and his family are scheduled to reach their final resting place today, the 80th anniversary of their murder by Bolshevik revolutionaries. The family's remains, which were discovered in 1991 in a pit north of Yekaterinburg, in the Ural Mountains, and authenticated by genetic testing, have been a source of contention among Yekaterinburg, Moscow, and St. Petersburg, all eager for a new tourist attraction. A government commission decided in favor of the last, where all Russian monarchs since Peter the Great have been buried.

Demographics

July is the busiest month of the year at cinema box offices. Many moviegoers will see more than they bargained for: on-screen advertising is expected to hit a record high this month, with nearly 70 million viewers—half of the moviegoing audience—seeing a television-style commercial before the



feature film. Such advertising first appeared in U.S. cinemas more than a decade ago, but was greeted with hisses and boos. Audiences have since become more accepting, or at least resigned, perhaps because of the encroachment of advertising into seemingly every other public venue. Many of this summer's on-screen ads, for everything from automobiles to clothing to books, will run before films rated PG13 and R, and will thus reach an age group that marketers often find elusive: 15-to-25-year-olds. Advertisers can expect their captive audiences to grow: the number of teenagers, an audience increasingly valued by movie studios, is expected to rise by some 3.5 million by 2010.



Environment

July 1: As of today, management systems intended to prevent accidents and toxic spills must be in force on many ships weighing more than 500 gross tons, including passenger ships, high-speed craft, gas and bulk carriers, and oil and chemical tankers. Under the International Management Code for Safe Operation of Ships and for Pollution Prevention, signed in 1994, both shore and shipboard staff must be given training that clearly defines their responsibilities in emergencies. The code affects some 20,000 ships worldwide; those not in compliance risk losing insurance coverage, being denied access to international ports, or being detained in port. More than 200 vessels are lost at sea each year, in many cases causing considerable environmental damage; at least 45 million gallons of oil have been spilled in U.S. waters alone since 1986. The code is expected to reduce dramatically both the number and the impact of such accidents.

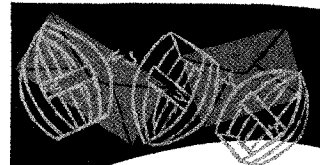


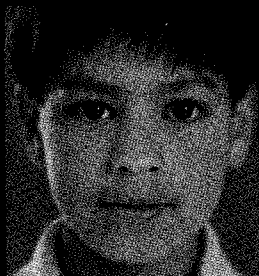
Expiring Patent

No. 4,277,224. Fan Attachment for Rocking Chairs. "A fan driven by the oscillatory motion of a rocking chair, comprising: a vertical rod hingedly connected to the [chair], an endless belt connected to the top of the vertical rod, . . . the belt being free to move in response to oscillatory motion of the vertical rod, a horizontal shaft located near the upper end of the belt loop, a set of gears . . . arranged to transform oscillatory motion of the belt into continuous rotation of the shaft, [and] fan blades mounted on the shaft."

75 Years Ago

Frances Lester Warner, writing in the July, 1923, issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*: "The magnetic human race needs slight provocation to arrange itself in groups. Take three old rowboats, and beach them high on the shore not far from the seaside post-office, and they will form the perfect gathering-place for a group that will camp there among the sandpipers when it is time for the mail. . . . Each cottage sends down its most serviceable or public-spirited or mercurial souls. . . . The weathered dories dry-docked on the sunset beach are all the forum that they need for wise and confidential speech. The punctual trustees who perch and talk there are fully provided with the three social elements that have held together all the famous clubs and coteries of the world: a reason for coming, a point of view, and a place to sit."





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A Republic— If We Can Keep It

*The present corrupt system of financing elections,
a U.S. senator argues, poses a serious threat to our democracy.*

*The sad lesson of the recent campaign-finance scandals
is not only that the laws are vaporous but also that politicians
won't change their ways without public pressure*

OF the many remarks uttered during the U.S. Senate investigation of the 1996 national elections—elections that saw the laws on campaign spending and contributions stretched to the point of absurdity—one of the most telling came in a brief comment by the former White House deputy chief of staff Harold Ickes. Challenged about his handling of a questionable transaction during the final week of the 1996 campaign, Ickes defended his conduct in part by pointing to the chaotic atmosphere all around him: “We were like Mad Hatters,” he said.

This allusion to the fundraising madness of the 1996 election cycle seems apt—too many good people were running around like Mad Hatters doing all kinds of bad things. There was a surreal quality to the whole scandal, with its bizarre cast of characters, the tortuous logic that many participants employed to rationalize their actions, and the sense as the investigation went on that the polity has fallen down a long, dark hole into a place that is far from the vision and values of those who founded our democracy.

In that strange place the law appears to be written in invisible ink. It is somehow possible for wealthy donors to give hundreds of thousands of dollars to political campaigns, even though the



law is clearly intended to limit contributions to a tiny fraction of such sums. It is possible for labor unions and corporations to donate millions to political parties at the candidates' request, despite a decades-old prohibition on the involvement of unions and corporations in national elections. It is possible for tax-exempt groups to run millions of dollars' worth of television ads that clearly endorse or attack particular candidates, even though these groups are barred by law from engaging in such partisan activity. And it is possible for presidential nominees to continue putting the touch on contributors, even though they have pledged under the law not to raise any more money for their campaigns after receiving enormous lump sums (\$62 million apiece for Bob Dole

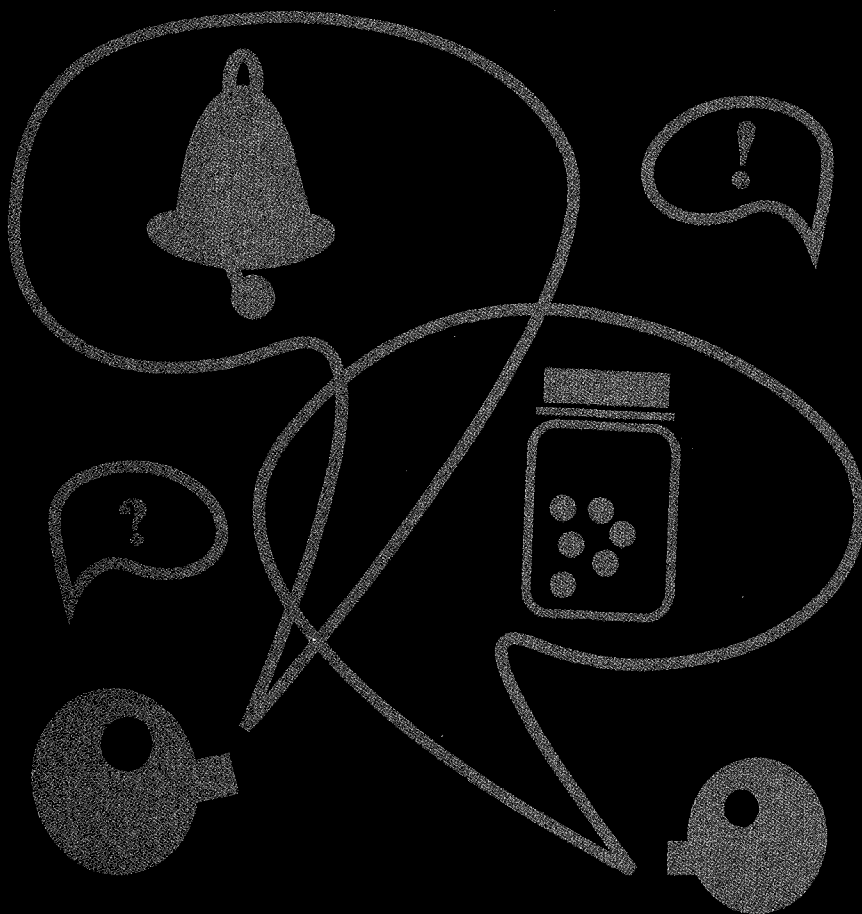
and Bill Clinton in 1996) in public funds.

The fundraising scandal of 1996 was a very real tragedy, with very real consequences for our democracy. People at the highest levels in both political parties did more than just strain credulity: they betrayed the public trust. In their breathless, unbounded rush to raise even more money for even more television advertising, they effectively hung a giant FOR SALE sign on our government and the whole of our political process.

by **Joseph Lieberman**

Illustration by Alison Seiffer

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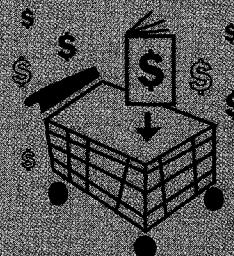
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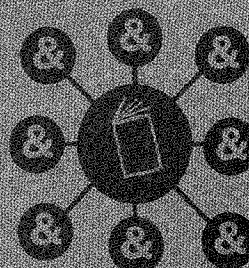
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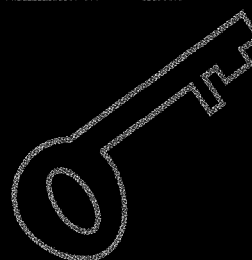
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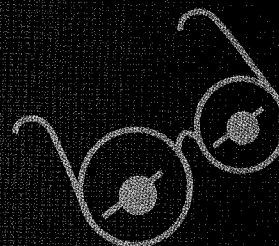
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They also gave Americans, already beset by cynicism, good reason to doubt whether citizens have a true and equal voice in their own government. The dangers here must not be dismissed: corruption is a great killer of experiments in self-government. In 1787, as he left Independence Hall at the close of the Constitutional Convention, Benjamin Franklin was asked what kind of government the country now had. He replied, "A republic, if you can keep it." Franklin was worried about a tendency toward monarchy. The threat today, imminent and real, is a state of affairs in which money itself is King.

One of the central problems exposed by the campaign-finance revelations has to do with the distinction we make between illegal conduct and improper conduct in public life, and the standards we use to judge such conduct. To this day some prominent elected officials contend that most of the scandals of 1996 involved violations of laws already on the books, and that therefore the appropriate response is simply tougher punishment and tougher enforcement. The reality is otherwise. Most of the sleazy behavior that characterized those elections was legal. The blatant skirting of limits on individual contributions; the subversion of restrictions on presidential candidates who receive public funds; the conversion of supposedly nonpartisan, tax-exempt groups into political agents; the fact that unions and corporations funneled millions of dollars into the two parties despite the law's absolute ban on their involvement in national campaigns—all these acts compromised the integrity of our elections and our government, and all plainly violate the spirit of our laws. Yet all of them also appear to be legal.

In effect, then, what the law permitted in 1996 was as outrageous as any crime that was committed. This point is enormously significant, not just in terms of gauging the import of this scandal but also for determining the steps we should take to repair our broken campaign-finance system. It may be that enforcement of various kinds will curb some of the illegal activities that occurred during the 1996 elections. Yet we can make no similar statement about the wide range of corrosive activities that continue to be legal. In fact, just the opposite is true—it is certain that these behaviors will persist unless we make them illegal.

■ ■ ■

It is not only the political system that has been compromised and corrupted; so have the values and standards of those who operate within it. In politics as in many segments of our society today, from professional-sports leagues that wink at the shocking behavior of big stars to TV talk-show producers who achieve new lows in degradation and exploitation every day, the bottom line—raising money—has too often become the dominant line. Basic differences between right and wrong have become blurred. The moral standard for campaigns today is not what is unassailably proper but what is technically legal.

Plugging the most egregious loopholes to make the clearly improper clearly illegal will deter some future wrongdoing, which is sufficient reason to plug them. But these changes won't be enough. The law serves as an expression of our values. It can stake out ethical boundaries, point us in the right direction, and punish actions that are wrong—but it cannot compel moral behavior. We cannot fully write into law what citizens have a right to expect from their representatives—that those who wish to write the rules for the nation will themselves respect the rules, rather than searching high and low for ways to evade legal requirements and eviscerate their intent; that those who have sworn to abide by the Constitution will honor the trust and responsibilities the Constitution places in their hands, rather than catering to the special interests depositing soft money in their pockets. For our democracy to function, we must rely on a common core of values beyond what the law requires, a system of moral checks and balances comparable to the ones built into the Constitution. But over the past several years the pressure to raise huge amounts of money has eroded those values among politicians—has "defined deviancy down"—and left them prey to their baser instincts.

The 1996 elections provided ample evidence of the threat that political money-scrounging poses to the legitimacy of our government. Although it has yet to be proved that any U.S. policy, foreign or domestic, was altered by any of the hustlers and opportunists who bought access to some of our top leaders, we cannot deny that the potential existed for this kind of purchase. Nor can we ig-

nore the dangers inherent in the simple appearance of influence peddling. Consider some of the comments volunteered by the unsavory characters who sought to buy their way into our political system. Johnny Chung: "I see the White House is like a subway—you have to put in coins to open the gates." Roger Tamraz, explaining how money bought him political access that had been denied him through other channels: "If they kicked me from the door, I will come through the window."

Hearing these comments, the average American would have every reason to suspect the worst about the government and those who are running it, and to question just whose interests are being served. This may be the gravest consequence of the moral breakdown that our politics has suffered. Take away the Johnny Chungs and the Roger Tamrazes and the other shakedown artists, and we are still left with a system that bends over backward to indulge big donors and their special interests, a system that suggests to the public that power will be exercised chiefly in behalf of those who pay top dollar.

■ ■ ■

The breakdown in our political values is akin to a broader problem in our society—the sense that popular culture has disoriented our moral compass. In the intense competition for higher television ratings or more record sales, many good people working at great and honorable companies have debased themselves by conveying images of extreme violence, sexual promiscuity, and vulgarity into our children's minds. By extension they have debased us all. And they have defended their behavior by waving the First Amendment as if it were some kind of constitutional hall pass, whereby the right to speak freely justifies any and all behavior exercised under that right, no matter who is hurt.

What has happened within our culture is strikingly similar to what has happened within our polity. Both arenas are plagued by enormous competitive pressures, the powerful temptation of big money, and a reflexive reliance on the right of free speech to shield the unseemly and the corrosive. In Hollywood the thinking goes, If I can say it or portray it and people will pay, then I must indeed say it and portray it, because then I will succeed. In Washington the analogue is, If the law

does not clearly prohibit me from doing it, then I must do it or I will lose.

Our experience in the so-called culture wars tells us that it is unrealistic to expect politicians to change their behavior and elevate their standards voluntarily. It is imperative to change the way our political process works—to suppress the temptation to stray from core values. And the only way to accomplish this is to reduce the unrelenting pressure to raise vast sums of money. The most promising step would be to close the soft-money loophole through which corporate and labor-union money floods, making a mockery of the rules that bar those very entities from contributing to campaigns. A further step would be to prohibit presidential candidates who accept public money from raising any other money. Other steps might be to eliminate fake “issue ads” broadcast by political parties and independent groups and to encourage voluntary limits on campaign spending.

The mistrust and alienation that many Americans feel toward their government and their elected leaders are reflected over and over again in polls. A Gallup poll after the 1996 elections found that just 32 percent of the public trusts in government to “do what is right” most of the time. A survey done by Peter Hart and Robert Teeter for the Council for Excellence in Government found that when asked whether elected officials have honesty and integrity, nearly three quarters of the respondents said no.

One powerful indicator of the public's lack of confidence is its reaction to campaign-finance reform. When asked whether they believed that major changes in the laws could reduce the corrupting influence of big money in politics, nearly 60 percent of the respondents said that special interests will always find a way to maintain their power in Washington, no matter what laws we pass.

Such hopelessness is undoubtedly why the public has not been demanding campaign-finance reform. The first task for reformers in both parties is to raise the level of trust to the point where people believe that reform can make a difference, so that they will demand it from their representatives. Without that demand reform will not happen. The responsibility falls on us all, in and out of public life. We no longer have the luxury of waiting idly for others to take the lead. ☼

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The Danger of Space Junk

In a place without landfills, what goes up had better come down

ON the wall of Darren McKnight's office, in Reston, Virginia, is a display that would give pause to anyone who might be considering a trip into space: two gnarled pieces of metal shot through with shredded electrical wires and mangled rivets. They are fragments of a Navy satellite that was shattered during a test in a Tennessee bunker by a plum-sized aluminum ball traveling at a speed of about four miles per second. On McKnight's desk is a photograph showing the thousands of other pieces of debris generated by the test, which McKnight, a vice-

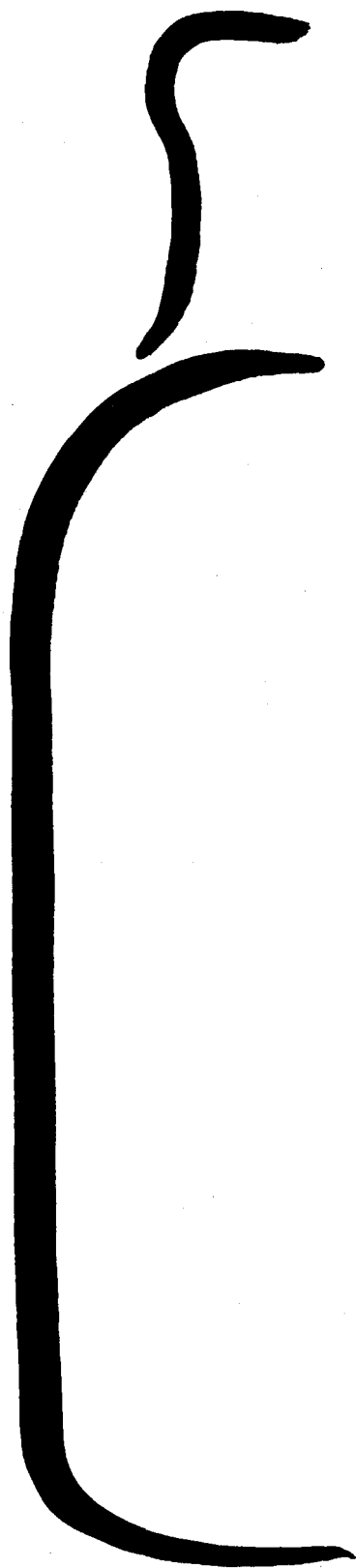
president of a company called Titan Research and Technology, and other researchers carried out to simulate the collision of a satellite with a piece of orbiting space junk. From the photograph alone it's impossible to tell what the metal fragments might once have formed.

by Steve Olson

Everything that human beings launch high enough into space will ultimately end up like that shattered satellite. As long as an object is above the last traces of Earth's atmosphere, it will stay in orbit for thousands or even millions of years. Eventually, whether a month or a millennium after launch,

it will hit one of the millions of other objects orbiting Earth. That collision will generate new fragments, like the ones in McKnight's picture, which will go whirling around the planet until they, too, are involved in collisions. Over time everything in Earth's orbit will be ground into celestial scrap.

The space shuttle *Endeavor* is scheduled to ferry the first U.S.-built component of the International Space Station into orbit several months from now. A steady stream of modules and structural elements will follow over the next five years. If the station remains in space, it will eventually collide with a piece of debris. Maybe by then the station will be empty, its human occupants having moved on to other pursuits. But maybe not. If not, here's what the astronauts can expect. If a piece of debris the size of McKnight's aluminum ball hits a pressurized module, it will rip a five-inch hole in the wall. Because of the tremendous speed at which objects in orbit move—typically about six miles per second—the collision will liquefy both the piece of debris and the wall of the module. Molten metal will splatter the



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inside of the module, accompanied by a flash of heat and blinding light. Air will begin streaming out the hole, leaving any surviving astronauts just a few minutes to escape. If the piece of debris is larger, the module may undergo what engineers call "unzipping": its exterior will peel away from the frame like that of a banana, spewing the contents of the module into space.

Today the risk of such a disaster for a satellite or a small craft like the shuttle is relatively low, though *Mir*, the Russian space station, launched in 1986, has been hit by objects large enough to dent the inner wall of the crew compartment. But the International Space Station, much larger than *Mir*, will be a plump target for debris. Each decade that it is in orbit, according to a recent study, the station will have about a 20 percent chance of undergoing a "critical penetration" that could kill a crew member or destroy the station—and the chances will increase as more objects are launched into space. In contrast, the chances of being in a commercial-airliner accident in the United States are about one in three million.

Venturing into space is inherently risky, and orbital debris is just one of many hazards that a space traveler faces. But the debris hazard is unique in being a product of our environmental negligence. After just forty years in space we

cial enterprises that are now leading the way into space. Yet every four days, on average, another rocket that will make the problem worse is launched into space. According to Molly Macauley, a debris expert and a senior fellow at the non-profit environmental organization Resources for the Future, "It's going to take a major catastrophic debris event, probably involving loss of life, before this issue gets widespread attention."

SPACE may seem remote, but it's really not that far away. If you could drive your car straight up, in just a few hours you'd reach the altitude at which the space shuttle flies. The popular orbits for satellites begin twice as far up—about 400 miles above our heads. The only satellites that are truly distant from Earth are the several hundred in geosynchronous orbit, a tenth of the way to the moon. There telecommunications and weather satellites orbit at the same rate that Earth rotates, allowing them to hover above a single spot on the Equator.

Since 1957 the United States and what is now the former Soviet Union have conducted about 4,000 space launches (the launches conducted by all other countries and international organizations combined account for just a few hundred additional forays into space). The leftovers from these launches—used-up satellites, the rockets that carried the satellites aloft, equipment from aborted scientific experiments—form a sort of orbital time capsule, a mausoleum of space technology. In 1963 the Air Force released 400 million tiny antennas about the size of needles into orbit in order to see if radio waves would bounce off them. Though communications satellites soon made the antennas obsolete, they still float in lethal clumps 1,500 miles overhead. In 1965 the astronaut Michael Collins lost his grip on a camera while on a space walk. Many spacecraft shed debris—bolts, lens caps, equipment covers, thermal blankets—the way children shed toys. A series of Soviet nuclear-powered spy satellites are leaking coolant into space that is congealing into balls about an inch in diameter. Even the paint on spacecraft has a tendency to erode in the harsh environment of space, creating a cosmic grit that now pelts everything in orbit.

Many of the objects released into space in the lowest orbits, like Collins's

camera, have fallen back to Earth. The upper atmosphere, where the space shuttle flies, gradually slows objects down; they re-enter the atmosphere and burn up within a few months or years. But a few hundred miles higher the atmosphere is so thin that it is ineffective for cleanup. Spacecraft that are launched into orbits at this height will stay in space indefinitely. "We and the Russians have been putting stuff up there for more than thirty years, and it's just where we left it," says Nicholas Johnson, the head of the orbital-debris program at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

Today radars that were designed to scan the horizon for incoming Russian missiles track a silent armada of space junk instead. The U.S. Space Surveillance Network routinely follows more than 8,000 objects that are larger than four inches across, which is approximately the lower limit of detectability for current technologies. When the network determines that the shuttle will pass within about a mile of a piece of debris, the astronauts may decide to fire the shuttle's rockets to give the junk a wider berth. But Earth's orbit also contains perhaps 100,000 objects that measure from half an inch to four inches across—objects too small to see on radar but large enough to cause a spacecraft to fail. They are the land mines of space, undetected until something crosses their path.

Especially troublesome are pieces of the more than a hundred rockets and satellites that have exploded in orbit. At the end of their useful lives spacecraft typically contain some fuel left over from launch or from orbital maneuvers. The fuel tanks deteriorate over time or are punctured by debris. The leftover fuels mix together and explode. In the worst case on record the explosion of a European Ariane rocket produced more than 500 pieces of debris big enough to disable a spacecraft.

It was the explosions of derelict rockets that first drew NASA's attention to debris. In the 1970s Delta rockets left in orbit after delivering their payloads began blowing up. An investigation by McDonnell-Douglas, their manufacturer, showed that the bulkheads separating the leftover fuels were probably cracking as a result of the rocket's passing in and out of sunlight. NASA began recommending that leftover fuels

The U.S. Space Surveillance Network tracks more than 8,000 pieces of debris, each large enough to disable the space shuttle

have seriously polluted the final frontier. Valuable orbits are peppered with debris that threatens the operation of satellites and the lives of astronauts. A small group of orbital-debris experts have been concerned about this problem for years, and have slowly gained the attention of the government agencies and commer-

be burned at the end of a flight, or that they be vented into space. Since then most public and private launchers have taken similar measures—such steps are relatively inexpensive means of limiting debris. Still, every few months on average an old rocket or satellite explodes, flinging a cloud of debris into space.

New objects in orbit will collide with debris from previous collisions, causing an unstoppable and dangerous “cascading”

Eventually the number of explosions will diminish, but by then spacecraft will be breaking up for another reason. As more objects go into orbit, spacecraft will begin colliding with—and being shattered by—debris. Furthermore, collisions beget more collisions. This process is known as collisional cascading, or the Kessler effect, after Donald Kessler, recently retired from his post as the head of the debris program at NASA. In the 1970s Kessler showed mathematically that once a certain amount of mass, known as the critical mass, is put into a particular orbit, collisional cascading begins even if no more objects are launched into that orbit. Originally dismissed as a mathematical fantasy, Kessler's prediction is on the verge of coming true. In the most popular orbits, Kessler says, “if we're not at the critical mass, we're pretty close to it.”

Debris researchers argue vigorously about whether collisional cascading has begun. Technically, a “cascade” begins only when a piece of debris formed in one collision causes a subsequent fragmentation—an as yet undocumented occurrence. But no one disputes that space is becoming a more dangerous place. Two years ago an old piece of an exploded rocket hit the boom of a French communications satellite, sending the satellite tumbling (though ground controllers eventually stabilized

it and got it working again). A Minuteman missile launched last January blew up just as it passed a piece of space debris, though the explosion could have happened for unrelated reasons. Whenever an old satellite or rocket breaks up for no apparent reason, suspicion focuses on debris.

Once collisional cascading begins, the number of objects in a particular orbit will gradually increase—and the risk to satellites and manned spacecraft will rise accordingly. A team of researchers in Italy, collaborating with Alessandro Rossi, a research fellow at the National Research Council of Italy, has calculated that enough objects are already present in two popular orbits, about 600 miles and 1,000 miles overhead, for cascading to begin. By the time the cascades have run their course, in a hundred years or so, even small spacecraft will suffer damaging collisions after just a few years in orbit. “This is only a projection,” Rossi says, but if we keep putting objects into orbit as we have been, “operations will not be possible anymore.”

FOR many years NASA and the Department of Defense were skeptical about the dangers of space debris. The problem seemed abstract, residing more in computer models than in hard experience. And it challenged the can-do mentality of space enthusiasts. Earth's orbit seemed too large and empty to pollute.

To its credit, NASA has long maintained a debris-research program, staffed by top-notch scientists who have persisted in pointing out the long-term hazards of space junk even when the higher-ups at NASA haven't wanted to hear about it. Then came the *Challenger* accident, in 1986. NASA officials realized that their emphasis on human space flight could backfire. If people died in space, public support for the shuttle program could unravel.

Engineers took a new look at the shuttle and the International Space Station. Designed in the 1970s, when debris was not considered a factor, the shuttle was determined to be clearly vulnerable. After almost every mission windows on the shuttle are so badly pitted by microscopic debris that they need to be replaced. Soon NASA was flying the shuttle upside down and backward, so that its rockets, rather than the more sensitive crew com-

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partments, would absorb the worst impacts. And engineers were adding shielding to the space station's most vulnerable areas. At this point the modules should be able to survive impacts with objects measuring up to half an inch across, and NASA is developing repair kits for plugging larger holes in the walls.

But adding shielding and repair kits won't solve the real problem. The real problem is that whenever something is put into an orbit, the risk of collision for all objects in that orbit goes up. Therefore, the only truly effective measure is a process known as deorbiting—removing objects from orbit when they reach the end of their useful lives. With current technology deorbiting requires that a satellite or a rocket reserve enough fuel for one last trip after its operations are finished. With enough fuel a spacecraft can promptly immolate itself in the atmosphere or fly far away from the most crowded orbits. If less fuel is available, it can aim for an orbit where atmospheric drag will eventually pull it to Earth.

The logic behind deorbiting has been inescapable since the beginning of the Space Age, yet it has just begun to penetrate the consciousness of spacecraft designers and launchers. In 1995 NASA issued a guideline saying that satellites and the upper stages of rockets within 1,250 miles of Earth should re-

partly because existing designs do not lend themselves to deorbiting.

Furthermore, the character of the Space Age is changing. Of the eighty-nine launches that took place worldwide last year, almost half carried commercial communications satellites. The private sector now puts more payloads into orbit than do NASA and the U.S. and Russian militaries combined. A score of communications companies in the United States and other countries have announced plans that will put hundreds of satellites into orbit over the next decade. Many will fly in relatively low orbits within a few hundred miles above where the space station will orbit, so that they can relay signals coming from hand-held phones.

None of these companies is under any obligation to limit orbital debris. Companies that are launching large constellations of satellites are worried about collisions between the satellites, and they are well aware that a public-relations disaster would ensue if a piece of a shattered satellite smacked the station. As a result, some plan to deorbit satellites at the end of their useful lives. But other companies are leaving their satellites up or are counting on atmospheric drag to bring them down.

Government regulations covering orbital debris are still rudimentary. For now, the federal agencies that have authority over commercial launches are waiting to see if the private sector can deal with the problem on its own. But deorbiting rockets and satellites is expensive. A satellite could keep operating for several additional months if it didn't need to reserve fuel for deorbiting. Some industry representatives say they want regulations, but only if the regulations apply to everyone and cannot be evaded. "Industry has a vested interest in keeping near-Earth orbit amenable to their continued operations," Nicholas Johnson, of NASA, says. "But companies want to make sure that everyone plays by the same rules."

International regulation will be even more difficult. Already the Russians and the Europeans launch a significant number of U.S. commercial satellites. U.S. launch companies would howl if the government imposed unilateral restrictions on spacecraft launched from U.S. territory. Extending restrictions internationally would probably require the

involvement of the United Nations, which would raise a host of additional issues about the equitable use of orbits. Though discussions are taking place at a technical level, no one expects international agreements on deorbiting to be achieved anytime soon.

HUMAN societies have done plenty of things that we or our descendants may someday regret. At the beginning of the Atomic Age we seriously polluted vast tracts of land that will take many billions of dollars to clean up. We have increased the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere despite a scientific consensus that global temperatures are rising as a result. We have dammed great and beautiful rivers even though the resulting reservoirs are filling with silt that will in time drastically reduce the dams' usefulness.

One reason for our nonchalance is that new technologies have gotten us out of many past scrapes—and maybe they will with orbital debris, too. Perhaps a future spaceship will race around Earth grabbing old spacecraft and flinging them back into the atmosphere, though it is hard to imagine a similar clean-up method for the small pieces of debris generated by collisional cascading. Maybe Star Wars technologies will produce a laser that can shoot orbital junk from the sky.

But no such technologies are available today. Two years ago a distinguished National Research Council committee concluded that "active removal of debris will not be an economical means of reducing the debris hazard in the foreseeable future." Even if some such technology were developed, it would probably be much more expensive than reserving a bit of fuel to bring a spacecraft down at the end of its functional life.

In 1987 the World Commission on Environment and Development defined sustainable development as meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. In space we are failing the sustainability test miserably. A hundred years from now, when our descendants want to put satellites into orbits teeming with debris, they will wonder what we could have been thinking. The simple answer is we weren't thinking at all. ☛

*"Deorbiting" objects
that are no longer
useful is the only truly
effective measure
to prevent the further
pollution of space.*

main in orbit for no longer than twenty-five years after the end of their functional lives. But the guideline applies only to new spacecraft and can be waived if other considerations prevail. As a result NASA and the Defense Department also continue to leave the upper stages of some of their launch vehicles in orbit,

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DANCE AND THEATER

BY NANCY DALVA AND JOHN ISEL

THE WORLD'S STAGE

The title of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, like that of its companion comedy, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, refers to an auspicious day in the Elizabethan calendar, and a cause for celebration. Masks are donned, identities are hidden, and love is lost and won. Lin-



Adam Resurrected

coln Center Theater's *Twelfth Night* promises to be a dreamy event indeed: Nicholas Hytner's cast features the Oscar-winner Helen Hunt as Viola, Kyra Sedgwick as Olivia, and the stage stalwarts Brian Murray and Philip Bosco as comic relief. The set designer Bob Crowley plans to outfit the Vivian Beaumont stage with a water-filled pool in which the performers will frolic. Other offerings in Lincoln Center Festival '98 (July 7-26; 212-721-6500) won't need a pool to make a splash. Theatre de Complicite, the mesmerizing London-based ensemble that floored audiences two years ago with *The Three Lives of Lucie Cabrol*, revives *The Street of Crocodiles*, based on the diaries of a Holocaust victim. Israel's Gesher Theatre contributes a harrowing Holocaust play as well: *Adam Resurrected*, which centers on a circus clown who survives a concentration camp by entertaining inmates on their way to the gas chamber. The Gesher also brings Joshua Sobol's *Village*, a lyrical meditation on Palestine before Israeli statehood. Finally, La Fura dels Baus, the spectacle-mad Spanish troupe, puts a cyberspin on Goethe with *Faust: Version 3.0*. Featuring everyone from Berlioz to Brian Eno on its soundtrack, the show amplifies Duke Orsino's dictum, "If music be the food of love, play on." —J.I.

Nancy Dalva is the author of *Dance Ink*; Photographs. John Isel is a senior editor at Stagebill.

ON THE WATERFRONT

For the third summer running Chicago hosts a theater festival with fare that is strictly local. Theater on the Lake presents nine professional companies at a rustic venue that in the 1920s was a recovery center for rich kids with tuberculosis. Smack dab off the intersection of Fullerton and Lake Shore Drive, Theater on the Lake is now one of the best theater deals in America. A \$60 subscription buys ducats to nine shows presented by a wide range of the city's best companies, performing on successive weeks through the summer (June 23-August 29; 312-742-7995). This year's lineup includes a premiere by the venerable improv company Second City; *Our Town*, produced by the Steppenwolf Theatre Company; the brazen, anarchic Neo-

Futurists, who return with their long-running hit, *Too Much Light Makes the Baby Go Blind*; *Shakin' the Mess Outta Misery*, produced by the Chicago Theatre Company, devoted to African-American work; and the American Theatre Company's *Scapin*, an innovative adaptation of Molière. The directors Susan Booth and Curt Columbus act as the festival's artistic scouts, attending seventy-five to a hundred area shows a year in search of the right program. Columbus admits that last year, his first, was "an experiment." But the results demanded a repeat.

Now the mission statement has been honed. "The vision is twofold," Columbus says. "To represent the variety of Chicago communities, and to represent Chicago theater as a community." —J.I.

Our Town



SUMMER, WHEN IT SIZZLES

Just the dance for a sultry night is Paul Taylor's new tango number, called (after its music) *Piazzolla Caldera*. "You want sex?" Taylor seems to be asking. "I'll give you sex."

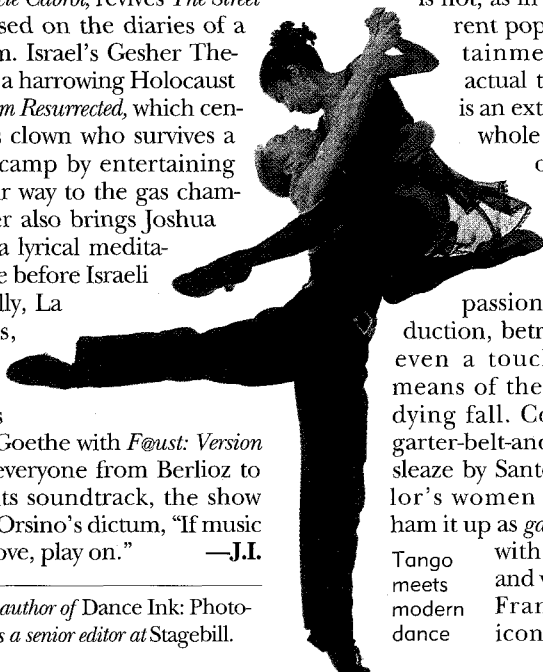
Taylor being Taylor, the dance is not, as in many of the current popular tango entertainments, a series of actual tangos. Rather, it is an extended riff on the whole essence and idea of the tango—not

merely the form but what informs the form. That is, heat,

passion, aggression, seduction, betrayal, desire, and even a touch of death, by means of the swoon and the dying fall. Costumed in full garter-belt-and-black-stockings sleaze by Santo Loquasto, Taylor's women don't so much ham it up as *gam* and *glam* it up,

with a deeply vulgar and voluptuous *plié* by Francie Huber the iconic center of the

enterprise. The Taylor men, deliciously sinister in their vestigial elements of Buenos Aires chic (picture a black vest over a bare chest), go for broke here, throwing elegance to the wings in favor of machismo. This is a particularly great moment for the company, which—like any longtime dance group—moves through various phases as dancers come, grow, and go. It currently achieves the modern-dance ideal: star power harnessed to the greater good of the ensemble. Taylor's dancers create a fabulous unity of impression, yet any one of them can hold the stage solo. Taylor himself—perennially handsome, diffident, dazzling—takes to the stage for a curtain call in his good-boy blue blazer and, without trying in the slightest, holds your heart. You can catch The Paul Taylor Dance Company at the venerable Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, in Lee, Massachusetts (June 30-July 5), with *Piazzolla Caldera* on one program, and a disturbing new work called *The Word* on the other; the World Financial Center in New York City (July 7); the American Dance Festival, in Durham, North Carolina (July 9-11); and The Spencer Theater in Alto, New Mexico (July 17-18). —N.D.

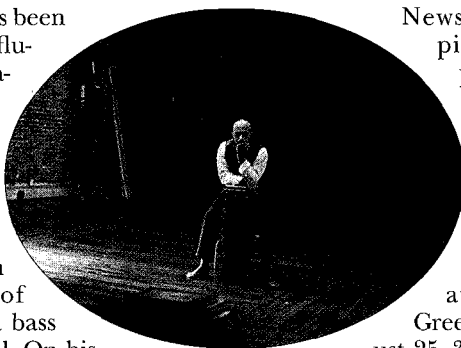


POPULAR MUSIC AND JAZZ

BY BOB BLUMENTHAL AND CHARLES M. YOUNG

CONTEMPLATION IN RHYTHM

The late and legendary jazz drummer Art Blakey used to convene percussion jam sessions—recorded on *Orgy in Rhythm* and other albums—as a change of pace from his usual small-band forays. Leon Parker is choosing similar drum-dominated programs as his *chef d'oeuvre*. The young drummer has been an underground influence on his generation of jazz musicians for nearly a decade, with a lean and infectious rhythmic approach that is usually realized on a minimalist set of one snare drum, a bass drum, and a cymbal. On his own recordings Parker's music is even leaner, with more international touches than his sideman work. *Awakening* (Columbia), his third album, is his sparest and most exotic to date. Focusing on such instruments as congas, marimba, gong, caxixi, and ashiko (and



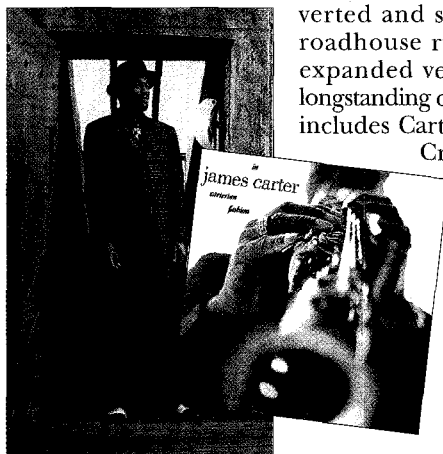
Leon Parker

in two instances drumming patterns on the piano), Parker puts the beat at the center of his intimate compositions, producing contemplative episodes that have the hypnotic effect of ambient music yet swing much harder. Adding texture and their own gentle passion

are Steve Wilson and Sam Newsome, two of the pithier young saxophone voices, and Adam Cruz, whose work on steel pan and bell reveals a sensitivity akin to Parker's. Cruz and Parker will jointly lead a group at Sweet Basil, in Greenwich Village (August 25–30). Parker can also be heard playing solo at the Edmonton Jazz Festival (June 27) and applying his stripped-down swing in the pianist Jacky Terrasson's trio at Jazzfest Caramoor, in Katonah, New York (August 1), and at Manhattan's Blue Note (August 18–23). —B.B.

THE DEMON FROM DETROIT

The common style among young saxophonists, especially those enthralled by John Coltrane's example, is to play macho and act humble. James Carter, a young virtuoso from Detroit, has loads of muscle in his music without much reference to Coltrane, while his carriage recalls Muhammad Ali in his "I am the greatest" prime. Confidence is hardly all that sets Carter apart, however; he can play all of the saxophone family and bass clarinet with absolute command, and he pays homage to swing-era legends like Ben Webster and Don Byas with the same commitment that marks his explorations of jazz's outer limits. In *Carterian Fashion* (Atlantic) adds a dash of restraint to Carter's typically combustible mixture and avoids his occasional sin of trying to play everything he knows in every solo. The mood is extro-



James Carter and his latest release

verted and soulful, with roadhouse riffs from an expanded version of his longstanding quartet, which includes Carter's sidekick

Craig Taborn; a pair of spirituals featuring Henry Butler; and two more-mainstream titles on which Carter joins Cyrus Chestnut's trio. Taborn, Butler, and Chestnut, all pianists by trade, are born, Butler, and Chestnut, all pianists by trade, are each heard on organ, and they bring a welcome lack of flash to the potentially overpowering instrument that sets the scene for Carter's rousing displays on soprano, tenor, and baritone saxes and bass clarinet. Carter's working band should turn in one of its usual show-stopping sets at the Montreal Jazz Festival on July 9. —B.B.

SWEDISH METAL

Drain S.T.H. released the best metal album of 1997, *Horror Wrestling*, inspiring twenty fan-concocted Web sites and selling about 60,000 units, which was quite good when you consider that their record company (The Enclave) was going out of business. After some contract maneuvering they are now signed with Mercury, which is re-releasing *Horror Wrestling* with three new cuts, thus making it, in all likelihood, the best metal album of 1998. It will restore your desire to declare your misery to an indifferent universe at really, really earsplitting volume. Four women from Sweden who understand melodic hooks and how to make a guitar roar properly (two qualities that rarely appear in the same band simultaneously), Drain S.T.H. somehow turn their societal alienation and metaphysical despair into something quite liberating—if you happen to enjoy mid-tempo,



Drain S.T.H.: Good mourning, America mournful, head-banging, grinding undulation. For those who prefer to do their mid-tempo, mournful, head-banging, grinding undulation in large groups, thus achieving a more complete Dionysian blowout of their brain synapses, the band will be touring through the fall. Watch for headlining gigs in small clubs. Watch for them to open for Megadeth and Monster Magnet (whose recent *Powertrip*, on A&M, is pretty monstrous too) in larger venues. And in very large venues watch for them doing the occasional gig amid their many metallic siblings filling the bill for Ozzfest '98 and the Warped tour. Finally, watch for their second album in January. —C.M.Y.

Bob Blumenthal is a jazz critic for The Boston Globe. Charles M. Young reviews popular music for Playboy, Musician, and other publications.

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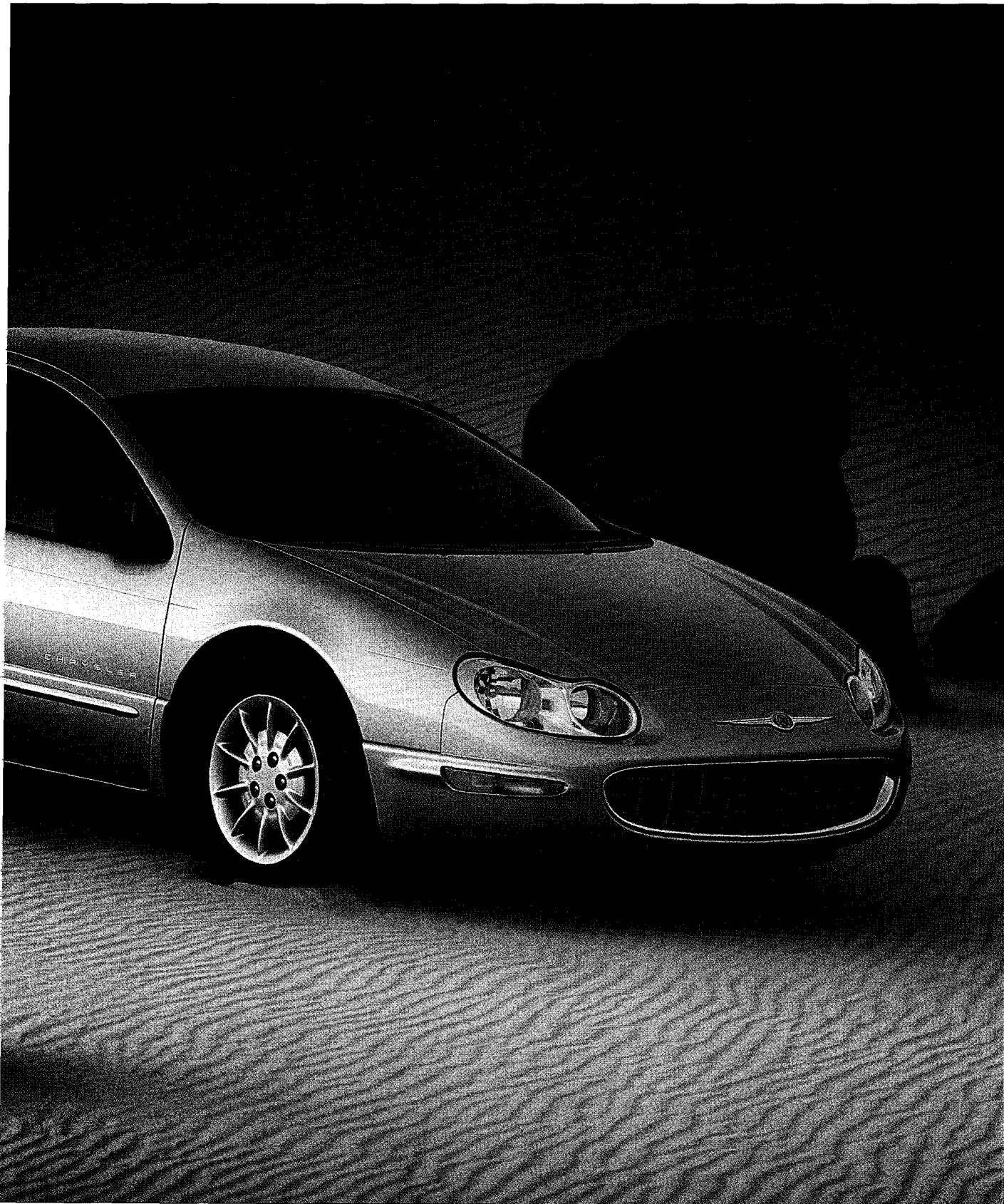
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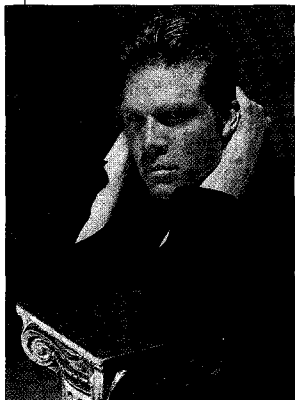
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BY AUSTIN BAER

STANLEY SINGS (SORT OF)

Working with a living composer always brings a few surprises. When Rodney Gilfry, the athletic California-born baritone whom glossies have variously dubbed the Matthew McConaughey and the Brad Pitt of opera, was studying the score of André Previn's new opera, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, he couldn't tell if the top note in a certain passage for Stanley Kowalski (Gilfry's part) was a G-flat or a B-flat. In Act I, which had already been printed, such problems did not arise. But this was Act II, which at this point existed only in far-from-tidy manuscript. Gilfry needed to know, so he asked. Previn's answer, in effect: What would you like it to be? "B-flat's a little high," the singer observed, "but I could do it in falsetto." A reporter wonders: would Stanley, the husky

"Polack" who made a star of Marlon Brando and a fashion statement of torn T-shirts, sing falsetto? "Good point," Gilfry answers, allowing that when he first looked at the music, he felt a little disappointed. The lustrous soprano Renée Flem-



Rodney Gilfry

ing, who sings the snooty, sex-starved, self-deluding Blanche ("I have always depended on the kindness of strangers") Dubois, gets an aria. So does Elizabeth Futral, the eye- and ear-catching soprano who plays her sister, Stella, working-class by marriage to Kowalski. "From a selfish point of view," Gilfry says, "I asked myself, What is there for me? But then I realized, Stanley is a character with no music in him. André has really caught that. It's a great role, but it isn't about voice." A pity, in a way, since Gilfry's instrument has stood out for its suave beauty in roles from Mozart's Don Giovanni to Britten's Billy Budd, in which looks also happen to matter. But when the curtain of the San Francisco Opera rises on *Streetcar's* world premiere, count on Gilfry for the animal magnetism that Tennessee Williams was banking on above all else when he wrote his classic play (September 19–October 11; 415-864-3330).

When rain falls in the desert, all kinds of strange flora sprout in a hurry, and few strains more instantaneously than the garden variety umbrella in the middle rows of the Santa Fe Opera, with its auditorium open to the sky. As of this season, however, the nylon forest—one of the quaintest phenomena on the international festival scene—is gone for good, and few are likely to mourn its passing. The time-honored opera house has given way to a new, improved model that preserves the best features of the old (sides and back of the stage open to the awe-striking New Mexico skyline) while correcting that one egregious design flaw. Of the season's five offerings, the impeccably cast *Beatrice and Benedict* (July 18, 22,

UMBRELLA, ADIEU

31, and August 6, 13, 20; 505-986-5900), adapted from Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* by Hector Berlioz, should prove the most entrancing. Aptly enough, its loveliest pages are a duet sung at night in a garden. Adding to its impressive list of thirty-five American premieres in forty-one seasons, the company presents *A Dream Play*, drawn from

August Strindberg's symbolist drama by his fellow Swede Ingvar Lidholm. As is usual at Santa Fe, the casts and production teams for these works, and for the more familiar *Madama Butterfly*, *The Magic Flute*, and *Salome*, have been chosen with exceptional care. Now that visibility is no longer weather-dependent, the only potential problem is the racket of raindrops (or hailstones) on the roof.



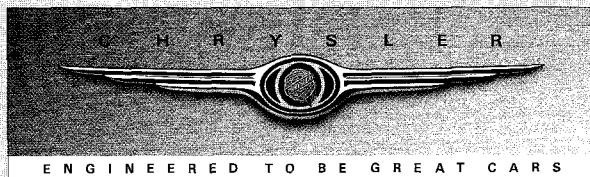
The new Santa Fe opera house

FOLLOWING IN BACH'S FOOTSTEPS

If the composer Krzysztof Penderecki, of Poland, does not go down in music history as the conscience of our century, it won't be for lack of trying. Since making his name with the soul-searching *Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima*, in 1959, he has weighed in with the *St. Luke Passion*, the *Polish Requiem*, and *The Seven Gates of Jerusalem*. The severe, jagged, often violent character of his scores has never prevented them from gaining wide appeal. Though never ingratiating, they convey messages that demand to be heard. Penderecki's latest is *Credo*, an hour-long setting of the most per-

sonal section of the liturgical mass—for a believer, the most austere yet universal text of all. It receives its world premiere on July 11, closing night of the Oregon Bach Festival, in Eugene, under the baton of the artistic director, Helmuth Rilling. Weighty fare for a summer eve, but that is the sort of festival that Rilling runs. And talk about raising the stakes. On opening night, June 26, Rilling pairs Penderecki's creed with J. S. Bach's own Mass in B Minor, a monument to the expression of faith by musical means that to date remains unsurpassed. For full details on the festival call 541-682-5000.

From July 19 to August 2 the world's best athletes will compete in the Goodwill Games, a multi-sport invitational taking place in and around New York City. TBS Superstation, the host network for the games, will televise prime-time coverage each night; CBS will host weekend and afternoon coverage; and HBO will televise the boxing competitions. Chrysler is happy to sponsor the Goodwill Games and to bring you this edition of the Arts & Entertainment Preview.



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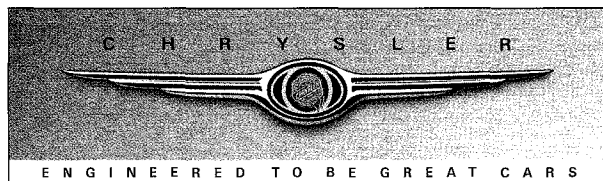


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Sculptures in Leather

Leather carvers in Sheridan, Wyoming, claim to be craftsmen, but the customers who wait years for their saddles know that they are artists

THE saddlemakers of Sheridan, Wyoming, carve leather with finesse on the order of skills like gunmetal engraving and scrimshaw. The saddles they produce are majestic creations—

by Jane and Michael Stern

fantastic to see, wondrous to touch, and delicious to smell. One could ride in them all day, rope big steers off them, winter with them in Montana's Judith Basin, and

they would stay strong for years. But they are more than durable; they are bas-reliefs in leather, flaunting fields of flowers, curling vines, and leaves that run deep into the surface of the honey-colored

hide. As Frank Lloyd Wright might have said, the carved bower is not *on* the saddle, it is *of* it. The surfaces of the saddles are stitched and layered with a surgical

precision that makes the different components—horn, pommel, seat, skirt, fender, stirrups—appear to be organic parts of a single whole. Whether viewed from the ground or from horseback, these saddles look like flows of sculpted leather made to hug an equine back and be hugged by a rider's thighs. Silver-dollar-size conchas or corner plates may adorn the leather skirts of the saddles. They, too, are embellished with detail, wrought in gold: bucking cayuses, hearts, and flowers.

A working cowboy's livelihood—and his very life—depends on a saddle that is comfortable, strong, and functional. The old folk song "Chisholm Trail" tells of a cowboy with a "ten-dollar horse and a forty-dollar saddle"; it is still true that horses come and go but a really good saddle will last a man a lifetime.

About a hundred years ago saddles were elevated from cowhands' working tools to dream objects that signified the frontier. Thanks to the romantic image of the West created by mythmakers as varied as Teddy Roosevelt, Buffalo Bill Cody, and the railroad magnate Fred Harvey, and also to a spate of pop-culture frontier heroes in books and weekly magazines, cowpunchers began to see themselves—and their gear—as the embodiment of freedom, independence, and adventure. Saddle shops, which had grown up throughout the West wherever the cattle business went, issued catalogues showing saddles far more handsome than any working ranch hand needed. The catalogues came to be known in the cowboy fraternity as bunkhouse bibles, and were studied and memorized by men for whom their contents were fantasies.

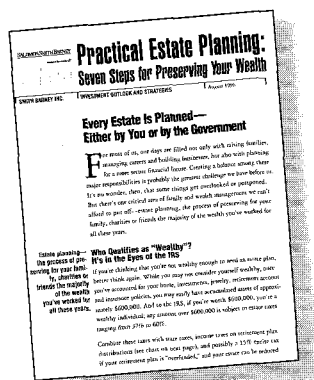
Long waits have always been part of the experience of acquiring a deluxe custom saddle. Most of today's top saddle-makers are at least a year or two behind in filling orders; one esteemed craftsman in northern New Mexico, a veteran carver well into his seventies, tells his new customers that the wait is ten years. The Montana cattle rancher Jim Hamilton wrote a poem called "The Rancher's New Saddle," in which he wryly described a harrowing two years of watching calf prices go down after he ordered

Above: a saddle by Don King

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an expensive saddle from Sheridan's legendary Don Butler. The poem ends with the rancher in his banker's office, getting a loan to pay for his prize.

The banker says, "What! Don Butler made it?"

Then he leans back in his chair with a smile.

"It still ain't real funny, but we'll loan you the money.

You may go broke, but at least you got style!"

The frustration is often compounded by the quirky nature of saddlemakers, who tend to be better artists than businessmen. Legend has it that one Sheridan saddlemaker used to take an order patiently, writing down everything a customer wanted—stirrup size, cantle angle, horn shape, and the like. Two years later he would deliver a saddle that he had made just the way he wanted. The punch line is that no one ever refused a saddle he delivered—it was too beautiful.

THERE was certainly nothing pretty about the earliest western stock saddles, which were scarcely more than wooden frames covered with leather ponchos. Cowboys who made the historic cattle drives north from Texas into Kansas and then up to the high plains were known for riding saddles that were big, tough, and plain. By the late 1870s cattlemen were pushing north of Cheyenne and grazing beef in the Big Horn basin, where the town of Sheridan soon became the main stop on the rail line. Though it was a dirt-street cow town, with its share of rough-around-the-edges frontier life, Sheridan was different from most range settlements. Many of the big cattle ranches in the area were owned by English aristocrats who had migrated to America to be closer to their holdings; what would become one of America's oldest polo fields was built near Sheridan in 1898. Local horse farms began to breed thoroughbreds for sport as well as quarter horses for cowpunching. Eatons' Ranch, along Wolf Creek eighteen miles from town, opened in 1904. One of the first dude ranches in the country, it quickly became the largest. Well-

heeled Americans seeking a taste of cowboy life headed to Eatons' or other local guest ranches, such as Spear-O-Wigwam, Bones Brothers, and Horton's H F Bar.

The popularity of the West was largely owing to the salesmanship of Buffalo Bill Cody, who in 1883 started thrilling crowds across America and the world with his Wild West show, which featured riders outfitted with deluxe western regalia much fancier than what any working cowhand would use. The show's gilded image of the frontier was so persuasive that buckskin fringe and tack with ornate tooling became part of the region's culture, inspiring genuine cowboys and dudes alike.

A required stop for enthusiastic dudes vacationing in Big Horn country was the saddle shop of Otto F. Ernst, which was a fixture in downtown Sheridan from 1902 to 1975, selling jeans, checkered shirts, cowboy boots, hats, and—to serious dudes—sumptuous Ernst saddles. Saddlemakers had worked in Sheridan since 1890 (every cattle town needed someone who could manufacture and repair tack), but the panache of Ernst's saddles put Sheridan on the map. Those he sold weren't just tools. With their floral carvings, they were handsome souvenirs of the Cowboy State. Ernst marketed them accordingly, choosing names for his various models that evoked the

cowboy spirit, such as the Barkey (after Roy Barkey, a rodeo star) and the Gollings (after the Western artist E. W. Gollings). He became known for his enticing catalogues and his calendars depicting cowgirls on horseback outfitted with stunning Ernst tack; traveling in his Dodge truck, he

took orders from Texas to South Dakota and from Oklahoma to California.

ALTHOUGH Ernst's saddle shop is no longer in business, Sheridan is still the best place in the West to order a high-grade custom saddle. You can make an appointment with one of the artisans in and around town, or you can simply wander into King Saddlery, on Main Street, the best-known and most respected saddlery on the high plains—so grand that when Queen Elizabeth came to Sheridan

a few years ago to see friends nearby (descendants of the ranchers who settled the Wyoming Territory), she visited the shop. Each Labor Day the town celebrates "Don King Days," a long weekend of old-fashioned roping and riding contests and polo matches.

King, who is seventy-four, speaks with a quiet voice, in the kind of level, self-assured tone that puts a nervous horse or a skittish cow at ease. He long ago gave up riding, because his knees had been wrecked by wild broncs, but he still looks like the quintessential cowboy. His hands are magnificent: strong and tough from years of hard ranch work, yet absolutely precise when he offers a handshake or points to an interesting feature of a saddle.

King first practiced his craft by turning scrap leather into wallets and belts for cowboys he knew and for tourists at the western dude ranches where his father worked. One winter in the late 1930s, when his father was working at the D Bar H guest ranch, in Palm Springs, King found some space in the back of a local saddle shop, where he made belts and other small leather items with a wild-rose pattern. He sold twenty-five of his belts to a guest at the D Bar H, Jack Kriendler, a co-owner of the New York club 21. When *Life* magazine ran a feature about dude-ranch fashions, the story included a picture of a lady friend of Kriendler's wearing one of the belts. At the time southern California was something of a leather crafter's paradise, thanks partly to the fancy tack that movie cowboys used. One day Edward Bohlin walked into the shop. Bohlin was America's most famous saddlemaker, a full-fledged celebrity who made the silver-bedecked saddles used by Tom Mix, Gene Autry, and Roy Rogers. He was so impressed by the young King's finesse with leather that he offered him a job on the spot. "I didn't take it," King told us when we visited him. "When you work in another man's shop, you work in his style. I wanted my own name."

King was fifteen years old at the time. In a trade in which apprenticeship is the only way to get ahead, his refusal was audacious. He went to Montana, where he took a job as a ranch hand and used his spare time to carve leather. In the early 1940s King worked off and on at Rudy Mudra's saddle shop in Sheridan. When he returned from the war, he went back to work for Mudra on the condition that



*An album
by William Gardner*

Mudra teach him how to build a saddle.

In 1947 King opened his own saddle shop in Sheridan. From the beginning he had more work than he could handle. But he soon closed the shop, unhappy to be confined to a bench. "Twice in my life I swore I would never build another saddle," he told us. "I preferred to break horses for a living."

King still carved leather when he had the chance, doing custom jobs and occasional piecework for other saddlemakers in Sheridan and Billings. His spare-time carving was already influential. William Gardner was thirteen years old when he started to apprentice with King. Today he is one of the acknowledged masters of the Sheridan style. The two met when King, at seventeen, went to break horses at the Neponset Stud Farm, where Gardner's father was the top hand. King showed Gardner how to make his own tools and how to cut elaborate patterns deep into the hide. "We've worked together like brothers and fought like brothers ever since Don came out to the ranch," Gardner told us. "Don's son John apprenticed with me when he began." It has been said that King and Gardner could each make half of one saddle and no one could see the difference. Yet when one compares saddles that each man has made independently, there is no mistaking their different styles. King's flowers are tight and coiled, their energy contained; Gardner's are lush, spreading, and deep. The difference is subtle, like that between artists' brushstrokes.

King is reluctant to call his work art. It sounds too prissy for something as tough as the saddles he has made. Although he has won a National Endowment for the Arts grant and many other accolades for his work, he prefers to call himself a mechanic. "They have tried to put the art thing onto saddles," he told us. "But to be a saddle craftsman you first have to be a good mechanic."

Chester Hape, who is retired but still does leatherwork for pleasure, also learned much from Don King. Hape carves the intricate flower pattern that is the hallmark of the Sheridan style, but his designs appear to be continuous, with every vine and leaf and flower connected. "I will break up a vine with another vine," he told us in his studio, "but only with a *single* vine, so the flow is never broken. I like to loop things through other things, so your eye never stops."

Hape, who is known for the precision of his carving, explains that his attraction to leatherwork came as no surprise. "All my family on my mother's side were carpenters and artists. I liked to draw and make things from the time I was little. Growing up around horses and ranches and rodeo, it seemed natural to put that feeling into saddles."

Like Don King, Hape is always ready to remind admirers that his saddles are built to work. He bristles at the notion that saddle-making is something people do as a hobby. "I call that the Tandy syndrome," he says, referring to the Tandy Leather & Crafts catalogues long popular among home hobbyists. "You have no idea how a saddlemaker has to work for years refining and developing his art. That is why there are so few good ones."

Most of the men who are now known for making Sheridan saddles, in fact, at one time worked with or for Don King. The trophy saddles King made in the 1950s and 1960s for world-champion rodeo cowboys set the standard for the highly refined floral style. Chester Hape explains that King's generosity as a teacher is part of what has made Sheridan such a productive leatherworkers' community. "Here you work on something and you think, 'All the other saddlemakers are going to see this. It better be good!' There is a lot of competition in this town, but it's friendly competition, the kind that makes you better."

KING formally retired about ten years ago, although even today he keeps up his leather-carving skills. His place at the bench has been taken by his son John, a former rodeo cowboy, who is now the saddlemaker; another craftsman, Jim Jackson, also works at King Saddlery. We watched John King transform a plain strip of leather into a magnificent belt. The small basement shop where he works is perfumed by the sweet, earthy aroma of tanned hide. King handles the leather with casual delicacy, pulling it across his palm, running his fingertips over the surface, positioning it on a cool marble block. Before it is carved, a piece of leather is wetted and then partial-

ly dried, to make it pliant. King stamps a line, straight or curved, into it and then, like a painter with a fine brush, wields a swivel knife to deepen and extend the line and give it shape. Finally he takes a stamping tool—nothing more than a nail or a quarter-inch bolt with a pattern that has been filed and ground into one end—

and holds it against the cut leather as he whacks it with a mallet to create a furrow. Curve by curve, line by line, the design in his mind travels through the tools in his hands to the leather.

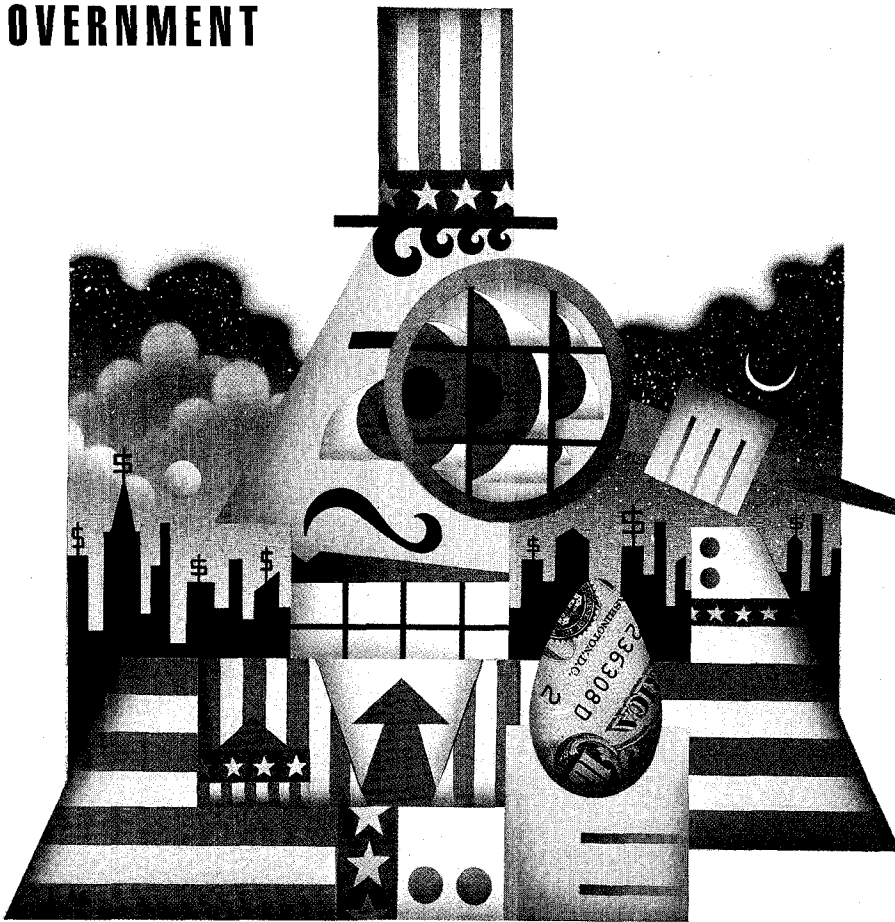
Chas Weldon, who lives and carves in Billings, Montana, also worked with Don King.



A bag by John King

At age forty-five he has emerged as one of the most distinctive talents among western leather carvers, and he recently built the saddles and tack for the Robert Redford movie *The Horse Whisperer*. Although he was born and bred in Montana, Weldon produces saddles that have the unmistakable refinement of the Sheridan style. His carving is detailed and precise, echoing the wild roses of a King saddle, and his craftsmanship is dazzling. Yet his style is also his own. Weldon has altered the traditional heavy roping saddles for which King is known, reaching back into Montana cowboy history for inspiration. "It's the Mexican vaquero way," he told us when we saw him in Billings. He pointed out the slick fork he likes on a saddle, with no swells in front to cushion a rider's thighs, and the stout horn, reminiscent of an old saddle from Rio Grande country but with all the Sheridan flourishes.

Weldon works alone, without apprentices, even though he has a waiting list of more than a year. He is too deeply involved in his work to share it. Cowboys, rope braiders, silversmiths, and other friends and colleagues frequently stop to gab with him as he stamps and stitches and neatly smooths pieces of leather onto rawhide-covered wooden trees. It is mesmerizing to watch Weldon pound, cut, and caress hide, gradually transforming it into a thing of supreme beauty. "I feel sorry for the saddlemaker that somebody asks to make a saddle like one of mine," he says. "Each time I build one, it's like constructing a new bridge." ☛



Nine Misconceptions About Social Security

To take a voguish example: Privatize Social Security? Any money saved would be eaten up in Wall Street transaction costs, including million-dollar salaries

1. *The Social Security Trust Fund is an accounting fiction.*

The Social Security tax has been raising more money than is needed to pay for current benefits, in order to build up a surplus to help finance the retirement of the Baby Boom generation. All of this surplus is lent to the U.S. Treasury when the Social Security Trust Fund buys bonds from it. The money is then used to finance the federal deficit, just like any other money the government borrows. The bonds held by the

by **Dean Baker**

fund pay the same interest as bonds held by the public. These bonds are every bit as real (or as much of a fiction) as the bonds held by banks, corporations, and individuals. Throughout U.S. history the federal government has always paid its debts. As a result, government bonds enjoy the highest credit ratings and are considered one of the safest assets in the world. Thus the fund has very real and secure assets.

It is true that the interest the government pays on these bonds is a drain on

the Treasury, as will be the money paid by the government when the fund ultimately cashes in its bonds. But this drain has nothing to do with Social Security. If the Social Security Trust Fund were not currently building up a surplus, and lending the money to the government, the government would still be running a deficit of approximately \$60 billion in its non-Social Security operations. It would then have to borrow this money from individuals like H. Ross Perot and Peter G. Peterson and to pay out more interest each year to the people it borrowed from. Therefore, the government's debt to the fund is simply a debt it would have incurred in any event. The government's other spending and tax policies, not Social Security, will be the cause if there is any problem in the future in paying off the bonds held by the fund.

The government bonds held by the Social Security Trust Fund will always be a comparatively small portion of the government's debt, and therefore a relatively minor burden. They will hit a peak of about 14.4 percent of gross domestic product in 2015, whereas the debt now held by individuals and corporations is about 47 percent of GDP. Therefore, at its peak the burden of interest payments to the fund will be less than a third as large as the interest burden the government now bears.

2. *The government uses overly optimistic numbers to convince people that Social Security will be there for them. The situation is much worse than the government admits.*

Actually, Social Security projections are based on extremely pessimistic economic assumptions: that growth will average just 1.8 percent over the next twenty years, a lower rate than in any comparable period in U.S. history; that growth will slow even further in later years, until the rate is less than half the 2.6 percent of the past twenty years; that there will be no increase in immigration even when the economy experiences a labor shortage because of the retirement of the Baby Boom generation; and that this labor shortage will not lead to a rapid growth in wages. Both possibilities excluded in these projections—increased

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"Leah keeps me in stitches."

— *Attache of Leah Witzig, Quiltmaker, State College, Pennsylvania*

immigration and rapid wage growth—would increase the fund's revenues. These projections are genuinely a worst-case scenario.

3. *The demographics of the Baby Boom will place an unbearable burden on the Social Security system.*

Those who want to overhaul Social Security make their case with the following numbers: in 1960 there were more than five workers for each beneficiary; today there are 3.3 workers; by 2030 there will be only two workers for each beneficiary. At present the fund is running an annual surplus of more than \$80 billion, approximately 20 percent as much as its current expenditures. This surplus will generate interest revenue to help support the system as the ratio of workers to beneficiaries continues to fall in the next century. Also, the fact that workers are becoming more productive year by year means that it will take fewer workers to support each retiree. The United States had 10.5 farm workers for every hundred people in 1929; it has fewer than 1.1 farm workers for every hundred people today. Yet the population is well fed, and we even export food. Rising farm productivity made this possible. Similarly, increases in worker productivity (which have been and should be reflected in higher incomes), however small compared with those of the past, will allow each retiree to be supported by an ever smaller number of workers.

In fact the demographics of the Baby Boom have very little to do with the long-range problems of Social Security. The main reason the fund will run into deficits in future years is that people are living longer. If people continue to retire at the same age but live longer, then a larger percentage of their lives will be spent in retirement. If people want to spend a larger portion of their lives in retirement, either they will have to accept lower incomes (reduced benefits) in their retirement years relative to those of their working years, or they will have to increase the portion of their incomes (higher taxes) that they put aside during their working years for retirement.

This is the main long-range problem facing Social Security. Current projections show that the annual deficit will be 5.71 percent of taxable payroll in 2070, long after the Baby Boom will have

passed into history. But the annual deficit is expected to be only 4.44 percent of taxable payroll in 2035, when the worst crunch from retired Baby Boomers will be felt.

Examining just the change in the ratio of beneficiaries to workers overstates the burden that workers will face in the future. To assess the burden accurately it is necessary to examine the total number of dependents—beneficiaries and children—each worker will have to support. It is projected that this ratio will rise from 0.708 per worker at present to 0.795 in 2035. But even this number is well below the ratio of 0.946 that prevailed in 1965. And the fund's trustees project a lower birth rate, meaning that the increased costs of providing for a larger retired population will be largely offset by the reduction of expenses associated with caring for children.

4. *Future generations will experience declining living standards because of the government debt and the burden created by Social Security.*

Projections indicate that workers' real wages will increase by approximately one percent a year. If Social Security benefits are left unchanged, in order to meet the fund's obligations it will be necessary to raise the Social Security tax by 0.1 percent a year (0.05 percent on the employer and 0.05 percent on the employee) for thirty-six years, beginning in 2010. This will be a total tax increase of 3.6 percent, approximately the same as the increase in Social Security taxes from 1977 to 1990.

Even with this schedule of tax increases, real wages after Social Security taxes are deducted will continue to rise. By 2046, when the tax increases are fully phased in, the average wage after Social Security taxes will be more than 45 percent higher than at present. As noted earlier, this is based on pessimistic projections about wage growth.

5. *By 2030 federal spending on entitlement programs for the elderly will consume all the revenue collected by the government.*

By far the greatest part of the projected increases in federal spending on entitlement programs for the elderly is attributable to a projected explosion in national health-care costs, both public

and private. According to projections from the Health Care Financing Administration, average health-care spending for a family of four in 2030 will be more than 80 percent of the median family's before-tax income. If such an explosion in health-care costs actually occurred, the economy would be destroyed even if we eliminated entitlement programs altogether. If health-care costs in the public and private sectors are brought under control, the problems posed by demographic trends will be quite manageable.

It is very deceptive to combine other spending categories with health care; projected health-care costs by themselves will consume most of the budget. For example, projected federal spending on education, highways, and health care combined should be more than 80 percent of federal revenues in 2030; defense spending plus projected health-care spending should come close to 70 percent of federal revenues.

6. *If Social Security were privatized, it would lead to a higher national saving rate and more growth.*

By itself, privatizing Social Security would not create a penny of additional savings. All the privatization plans call for the government to continue to pay Social Security benefits to current recipients and those about to retire; therefore spending would be exactly the same after privatization as it was before privatization. Yet the government would no longer be collecting Social Security taxes. Each dollar an individual put into a private retirement account rather than paying it to the government in Social Security taxes would still be a dollar the government must borrow. Individuals would be saving more, but the government would have reduced its saving (increased its borrowing) by exactly the same amount. Most of the privatization schemes being put forward call for additional taxes and additional borrowing to finance a transition while benefits were being paid out under the old system. Any additions to national savings attributable to these plans would stem entirely from the tax increase. This tax increase would have the identical effect on national savings if it were not linked to privatizing Social Security. In other words, raising taxes is one way to increase national savings, and if we are willing to raise taxes, we need not privatize Social Security.

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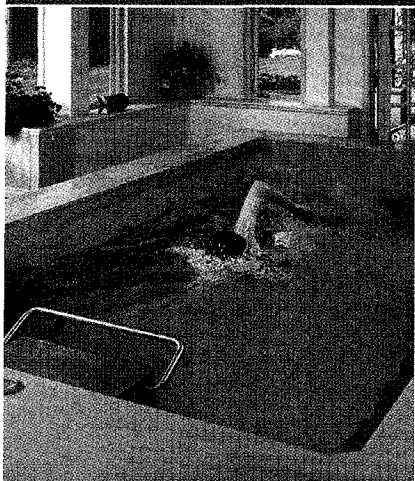
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The fact that individuals might put their savings in the stock market or in other private assets, whereas the Social Security Trust Fund buys government bonds, doesn't affect the level of saving at all. If it did, the government could increase the level of saving in the economy by borrowing money and then investing it in the stock market, or by borrowing money and giving it to individuals with the requirement that they invest it in the stock market. If either step could increase the level of saving in the economy, the government should take it independent of any changes in the Social Security system.

In fact, all else being equal, if individuals invested the money they would otherwise pay out in Social Security taxes, less saving would result, because a large portion of this money would be siphoned off by the financial industry. Currently stock brokers, insurance companies, and other financial institutions charge their customers an average of more than one percent a year on the value of the money they hold. Thus if \$1,000 is invested through a brokerage firm for forty years, the investor will have been charged in excess of \$400 in fees on the original investment, plus an additional one percent a year on all gains. These fees are a big cost from the standpoint of the individual investor, and a complete waste from the standpoint of the economy as a whole. Meanwhile, the operating expenses of the Social Security system are less than \$8.00 for every \$1,000 paid out to beneficiaries.

It is easy to see why costs in the private financial sector are so much higher. The private sector pays hundreds of thousands of insurance agents and brokers to solicit business. It also incurs enormous costs in television, radio, newspaper, and magazine advertising. In addition, many executives and brokers in the financial industry receive huge salaries. Million-dollar salaries are not uncommon, and some executives earn salaries in the tens of millions. Privatization would add these expenses, which are currently absent from the Social Security system.

7. *If people invest their money themselves, they will get a higher return than if they leave it with the government.*

This may be true for some people, but it cannot be true on average, for much the same reasons as noted above. Some people may end up big winners by

picking the right stocks, but if the national saving rate has not increased, the economy will not have increased its growth rate, and the economic pie will be no larger in the future with privatization than it would have been without it. Thus high returns for some must come at the expense of others. In fact, since the cost of operating a retirement system is so much greater through the financial markets than through the Social Security system, the average person will actually be worse off.

Some advocates of government-mandated saving plans argue that individual investors can get real returns of seven percent on money invested in the stock market (the historical rate of return), and that this would ensure a comfortable retirement for everyone. Certainly people have gotten far better returns in the market in the past few years, but if Social Security projections are accurate, such rates of return cannot be sustained. Profits can rise only as fast as the economy grows (unless wages fall as a share of national income, which no one is projecting). If stock prices maintain a fixed relationship to profits, then stock prices will grow at the same rate as the economy. The total return will therefore approximate the ratio of dividends to the stock price (currently about three percent) plus the rate of economic growth (two percent over the next ten years, but projected to fall to 1.2 percent in the middle of the next century). This means that the returns people can expect from investing in the stock market will be five percent in the near future and 4.2 percent later in the next century. For stock prices to rise enough to maintain a real return of seven percent, price-to-earnings ratios would have to exceed 400:1 by 2070.

8. *The Consumer Price Index overstates the true rate of increase in the cost of living. Social Security recipients are therefore getting a huge bonanza each year, because their checks are adjusted in accordance with the CPI.*

There is considerable dispute about the accuracy of the CPI. The Boskin Commission, which was appointed by the Senate Finance Committee to examine the CPI, stated in its final report, in 1996, that overall the CPI had been overstating the cost of living by 1.3 per-

centage points a year. However, the Bureau of Labor Statistics found that the CPI understated the cost of living when compared with an index that measured the cost of living for the elderly. This is because the elderly spend an unusually large share of their income on health care and housing, which have risen relatively rapidly in price. Questions remain about the accuracy of the CPI, and they cannot be resolved without further research.

However, one point is clear. If the CPI has been overstating inflation, then future generations will be much better off than we imagined. If inflation has been overstated, then real wage growth must have been *understated*, since real wage growth is actual wage growth minus the rate of inflation. If we accept the Boskin Commission's midrange estimate of CPI overstatement, average real wages in 2030 will be more than \$54,000 (measured in today's dollars). If the commission's high-end estimate is right, average wages will be nearly \$65,000. By 2050 average wages will be at least \$82,000 and possibly as much as \$108,000.

Another implication of a CPI that overstates inflation is that people were much poorer in the recent past than is generally recognized. This conclusion is inescapable: if the rate of inflation is lower than indicated by the CPI, then real wages and living standards have been rising faster than is indicated by calculations that use the CPI. If wages and living standards have been rising faster than we thought, then past levels must have been lower. Projecting backward, the Boskin Commission's estimate of the overstatement of the CPI gives a range for the median family income in 1960 of \$15,000 to \$18,000 (in today's dollars)—or 95 to 110 percent of income at the current poverty level.

If the Boskin Commission's evaluation of the CPI is accepted, any assessment of generational equity looks very bad from the standpoint of the elderly: they lived most of their lives in or near poverty. And the future looks extremely bright for the young. Average annual wages in 1960, when today's seventy-three-year-olds were thirty-five, was between \$10,006 and \$11,902 in today's dollars. Average annual wages in 2030, when today's newborns are thirty-two, will be between \$54,000 and \$65,000 in today's dollars.

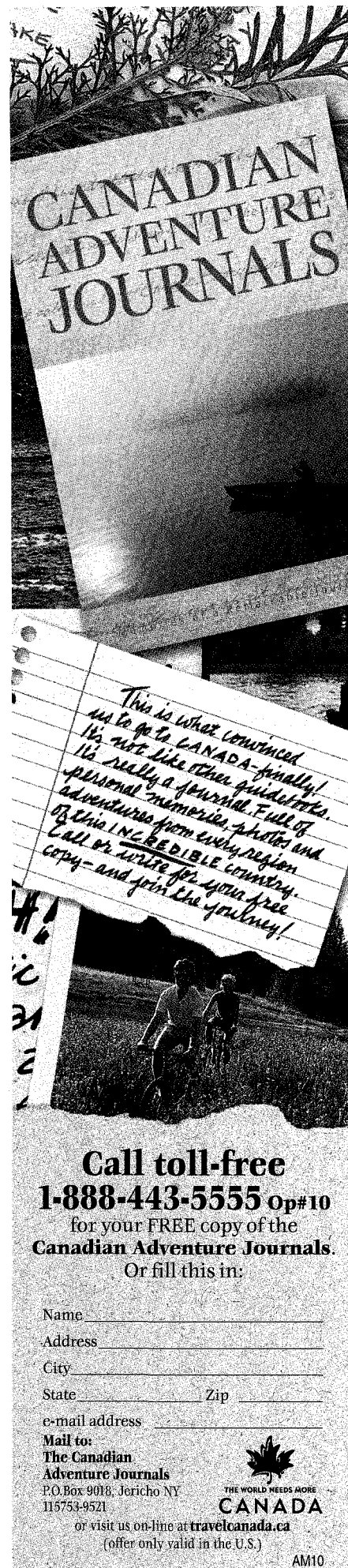
Such numbers make it hard to justify cutting Social Security for the elderly in order to enrich future generations, on the grounds of generational equity.

9. *Social Security gives tens of billions of dollars each year to senior citizens who don't need it. This money could be better used to support poor children.*

Most of the elderly are not very well off. Their median household income is only about \$18,000. However, even if they were better off, it would be hard to justify taking away their Social Security on either moral or economic grounds.

Social Security is a social-insurance program, not a welfare program. People pay into it during their working lives. They have a right to expect something in return, just as they expect interest payments when they buy a government bond. Social Security is already progressive: the rate of return on tax payments is much lower for the wealthy than for the poor. This progressivity is enhanced by the fact that Social Security income is taxable for middle- and high-income retirees but not for low-income retirees. If benefits for higher-income retirees were cut back further, those people would be receiving virtually no return for the taxes they paid in. This would be certain to undermine support for the program.

From an economic standpoint, means testing or any other way of denying benefits to the wealthy would be foolish, because it would give people a great incentive to hide income and thereby pass the means test. There are many ways this could be done. Parents could pass most of their assets on to their children and then continue to collect full benefits. People could move their money into assets that don't yield an annual income, such as land or some kinds of stock. Most of the income of retirees is from accumulated assets, which makes it much easier to hide than wage income. Means testing would in effect place a very high marginal tax rate on senior citizens, giving them a strong incentive to find ways to evade taxes. It may be desirable to get more revenue from the wealthy, but means testing for Social Security makes about as much sense as means testing for interest on government bonds. ☼



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Autumn Becomes Ireland

Late in the year the Irish countryside is more enchanting than ever

ON a palely sunny autumn morning my wife and I arrived at the door of Mount Falcon Castle (despite its name, a little country-house hotel), in the west of Ireland. There

by Richard Todd

was a stillness about the place as we stepped inside. Hunting trophies, some of them clearly exotic, decorated the high

paneled walls. I looked at the bookcase. *Hunting Ibex in the Himalayas* was a representative title. So very quiet.

In a moment, though, a cheery young fellow appeared, said, "Hello hello hello," and introduced himself as Steven, the manager; before long my wife and I were sitting by a fire in the library.

An Englishwoman in her eighties joined us: Constance, Steven's grandmother, and the owner of the house. She said "Hello hello hello" too—a custom of the country. Did we like dogs? she wanted to know. The reasons for the question were by now about our feet, a trio of handsome springer spaniels. Soon one was on the chintz-covered sofa. We liked dogs.

I had those feelings common to overnight travelers—lead-en of limb, delusionally clear of mind, and hungry. In need, how we appreciate tact. And it was tact when Steven looked in and asked if we might like a "small" fried breakfast.

It arrived, and it was every bit as small as I had hoped: eggs, tomatoes, mushrooms, sausages, blood pudding, bacon, toast, and tea. You may have a policy on breakfast (even I may have a policy on breakfast), but this is the indisputably right breakfast to have after an all-night flight to Ireland. And the right move after that is sleep. We were quickly upstairs, to awaken a few hours later, in time to walk outside in what had become by then a pleasantly moribund afternoon.

Celtic twilight—mushy term, beautiful thing—is an all-year phenomenon; it just



ABOVE: JOE CORNISH; LEFT: RICK HENDERSON/CELTIC IMAGES

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communicate with the people and significance of the award.
[William Faulkner]



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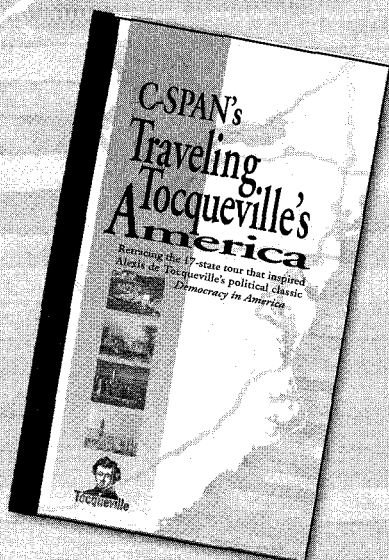
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begins early (about 3:00 P.M.) in the fall. And so we set off on a network of farm lanes behind the house, through woods and pastures, the springers behind, alongside, and ahead. The day ebbed away around us, though color remained above the blackened treeline—a Magritte sky. Then the sky, too, began to fade, and the air thickened, as we walked with a quicker step to the lights of the house.

Ireland in late autumn is not everyone's idea of a good or even a plausible time, but it is mine. The light provides reason enough to make this journey—and for some people, perhaps, reason enough not to. (Prospective travelers who suffer from seasonal affective disorder should probably consult a physician.) Ireland, after all, shares a latitude with places like Labrador and Saskatoon, and the sun angles down in a strikingly different way from its aspect even in northern New England. But of course Ireland *isn't* Labrador, and thanks to the benevolent Gulf Stream its fields stay green, seeming even to intensify into a brilliant electric color with the season. To a North American eye the slight confusion of low light and lush grass makes for an eerie beauty.

During the short course of a day you find yourself very aware of the sun's diffident little parabola. Noon occurs—I saw it on my watch, though I never quite caught it in the sky. Nonetheless, the day seems to consist of a long time that is early morning and another long time that is late afternoon. The sun slants across the landscape, making theatrical shadows and silhouettes, shining full on the brilliant white gable end of a house miles distant, revealing each tuft of wool on a sheep's back. The very blades of grass in the pasture cast shadows.

I find this light exhilarating, but let's face it, it can stir pangs of melancholy, too. You may feel so joyous that you want to kill yourself—an Irish sentiment, surely. There are chords heard in Irish music that have the same effect in the viscera. (I cannot believe that only those of us with Irish blood are affected.) Perhaps this is the season they derive from.

I have been speaking of the sun as if its visible presence were assured. It isn't, of course; this is Ireland, where you can never bank on a fair day even in the middle of one. Oddly, though, you may stand a slightly better chance of finding clement weather in fall than at any other

time of the year. Sailors making an ocean crossing often choose this time, a window between hurricane season in the Atlantic and the winter gales that rake the Irish coast.

My wife and I had an elaborate three-day errand in Sligo town, about an hour north of the Mount Falcon. The sensible thing would have been to stay up there, but we had so thoroughly settled into the comforts of the hotel that it was impossible to move. At dinner each evening Constance presided. We were joined one night by a boisterous film company from Dublin, and another by a young Australian couple full of charm, and a pair of French *chasseurs* there for the snipe. (Except for their shaving cologne and their excessive admiration of my wife's French accent, the hunters had charm too.)

It's an odd lot of travelers you meet in Ireland in the fall—odd, and few. This is good news, unless of course you are in search of authenticity. Ireland has become so successful in presenting itself as a tourist destination that you can't see the place steady and whole without looking tourism full in the face. For the true Irish experience you should probably join a German tour group in July aboard one of those enormous buses that seem always about to get wedged between hedgerows.

But by the fall the buses have gone to the Costa del Sol. The Germans are Oktoberfesting. The Americans—well, you will always see Americans, though the typical one may be a lone guy surrounded by Irishmen, wary-hearty noises emanating from the group: global business under way. If you should not delude yourself that you are seeing the “real” Ireland in autumn, you may nonetheless get a look at some of the sinew of its nontourist economy.

IRELAND is a small enough country that visitors are sometimes tempted to “see it all”—a mistake here as elsewhere, of course. Our work done in Sligo, we could have had a fine time tramping around in the nearby Ox Mountains or walking along the beaches of the adjacent County Mayo. Knowing this, still we had decided to yield to curiosity and visit west Cork, a couple of hundred miles to the south. So imagine here a familiar film scene compressing five hours of driving—motorway and roundabouts, an entanglement with the traffic of Limerick

(just as gritty as Frank McCourt has told us)—and then the little car emerging into the wooded uplands outside snug Mallow and, just at twilight, turning into the stately driveway of Longueville House. Longueville began life in the eighteenth century as an Anglo-Irish mansion. Set in 500 acres of farmland, it has done duty as a hotel for the past fifty years. Here lambs graze outside the front door—plump creatures whose cousin you will soon enjoy at table.

The traveler's freedom is somewhat curtailed in fall, without that long evening light in which to reach your mark. No foreigner should drive on the narrow Irish roads at night. (Indeed, I don't think the Irish are so keen on driving then themselves. Why do they pass each other at top speed in the dark—why else if not to get home sooner and out of harm's way?) But arrival before 5:00 P.M., with dinner at 8:00, has the benefit of providing three of life's more easeful hours, involving no problem more complicated than how exactly to allocate the time among tea, bath, nap, and drink.

From Mallow the Cork coast is easily reached, and we drove much of the length of it the next afternoon, fortifying ourselves with Bantry's famous rock oysters at noon. This southern coast is Ireland's most intricate, a favorite cruising ground for sailors; pleasingly, it can't be seen in one dazzled look, like the Cliffs of Moher or the other coastal spectacles of Ireland. Part of its charm lies in the myriad roads leading to peninsulas and small harbors.

We ended up at Kinsale, the town that fronts Ireland's most popular harbor in summer. It offers more than a good anchorage; it has lately become well known as a center—the center, if you listen to local boosters—of Irish cuisine.

Irish cuisine! Surprising how many people will still snort at this concept, though much has recently been written about the fact that they do now cook on this island. It's true that you can still arrange to have a diet of the bland and

overdone in Ireland, and this gives some travelers the pleasure of expectations fulfilled. Just as there are those who go to France to be insulted, so, too, people like to return from Ireland praising the scenery and rolling their eyes at the food.

But it's not necessary to punish yourself. The good restaurants are very good indeed, thanks in part to a recent influx of Continental chefs but chiefly to the recognition that unbeatable ingredients from the sea and the farm are right at hand and worth handling with care. We dined well on roasted salmon at the Blue Haven Hotel, in Kinsale, and even better on duck in a raspberry glaze at the Vintage, around the corner. Neither was inexpensive. Dining in contemporary Ireland has this in

told, warmly, by a friend and an admirer of his. On the day I was there, Youen's restaurant was closed, in a sense—he'll open it if he has two or three people in town wanting dinner. At midday I sought only what could be easily provided by the little dining room in his guesthouse. Perhaps a plate of cheese.

Youen brought out a selection of eight, consisting of matching pairs of French and Irish cheeses, and somehow we spent the better part of two hours discussing them, with numerous detours. A Roquefort and a Cashel blue; a Camembert and its Irish taste-alike, Guddeen farmhouse; some chevre from both countries; and a Gruyère and an Irish Desmond. I don't want to present myself as someone who should be

followed blindly into battle when the battle is about cheese. But I trusted my own appreciation of these Irish cheeses the more because it was reinforced by Youen's great enthusiasm for the local product. In this taste-off it seemed clear that any distinction between the cheeses before us would turn on patriotism rather than on real differences in quality.

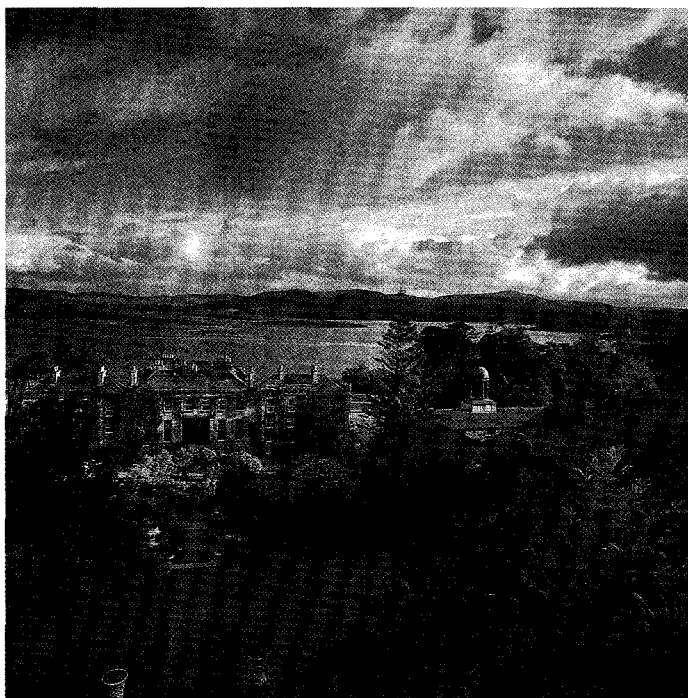
ON the road back to Kinsale I noticed something that I'd failed to see on a couple of other approaches to the town. Amid sugar-beet farms a paved road led to a large, low-lying building well screened by trees. A dis-

creet sign read PFIZER.

Ireland, it is often said, remains so beautiful in part by grace of its misfortunes—the Industrial Revolution passed it by. But its fortunes have turned in recent years, and right now the economy is booming. This puts the Irish to the test: how to talk about something so unbecoming as success?

Someone could do a learned paper titled "Irish Self-Deprecation: Charm, Superstition, and Guile." I dined one evening (my wife had had to leave early for the States) with a friend, an Irish businessman. The old routine comes naturally to him, as in this joke about the nature of Ireland: "So the fellow comes over from

JOE CORNISH



Bantry House, on Bantry Bay, is now a museum

common with dining in the United States: you tend to get what you pay for.

One of Ireland's most celebrated chefs is a long-transplanted Frenchman named Youen Jacob, the proprietor of Chez Youen and of an adjoining guesthouse in the seaside town of Baltimore. I found him there one noontime, a man of classic chef proportions and a bluff, engaging manner.

Youen is known not only for his cooking but also for the force of his personality. He is famous for meals that go on for hours because he insists on bringing on another course, another cognac. "Ah, Youen, *that* rogue—he combines the very worst of the Irish and the French," I was

Brussels, and he gets a bit frustrated at the time things are taking to get done. And he says in exasperation, "Tell me, do you people have a word in Irish that means *"mañana"*?" And the answer comes back, "Yes, yes, we do, we do, but I'm afraid it lacks the same force of urgency."

The affable procrastination of the Irish wasn't what occupied my friend's mind: like everyone else, he wanted to talk about the bustle of unprecedented prosperity that had swept the country. Years of investment in public education were now paying off, and the government's industrial policies had worked too. There are complicated ways of explaining those policies, but as far as I could determine, they amount to the encouragement of companies that produce things that range in size from invisible (services) to tiny (microchips) to small (pills). The ten leading drug companies in the world have factories in Ireland, and so many high-tech companies have settled into the Liffey Valley that people like to call it "Silicon Bog." Membership in the European Union has benefited the country enormously. You see it in the bright new tractors in the fields, in new motorways and joint-venture industrial estates. "You know," my friend said, "the Irish have always been good at manipulating systems, figuring out how to pull the levers—look at what we did to the city politics of your own country. And in point of actual fact, we have played the EU like a fiddle."

The success of the Republic has given a new dimension to the troubles of the North. No longer a poor cousin, the South now feels itself pulling away economically. In my friend's view, even some unionists were casting a wistful eye to the South.

Of course, we have a reflexive question when capitalism is going great guns: Will success spoil. . . ?

"What will spoil us is the lamentable taste of the Irish," said my friend. It's true that some signs of affluence already disturb the view. The holiday home may well prove the scourge of the Irish landscape. An Irishman likes his wall, and he

likes his gateposts, and he may well like his cement eagles atop them. These little bungalows with glossy black-tile roofs and picture windows fit reasonably well into suburbs, or even the heavily vegetated countryside, but on the bleak moors of Mayo or Donegal a cluster of them can pollute the scene for a mile. Similarly, one now almost winces when the blue-and-yellow signs of the EU identify a new road project.

And yet some perspective is needed. Sometimes, traveling, I follow a capillary



Cozy Kinsale, renowned for its cuisine

plan, which is to say no plan at all, except to drive and, when presented with a choice, to take the smaller road or the one that climbs a hill. In this way I meandered one afternoon in the hilly countryside of inland west Cork, through the market town of Macroom and on up the hills. It was not long before I was swallowed by a soothing rurality. This is a Gaeltacht region, where traditional culture is protected by law; you still hear Irish in the stores, and your own voice is heard as undifferentiated awyness. "Down from Dublin, are you?" I was asked.

The Famine was acute in these hills, and lore of it still comes quickly to the lips of residents. I stopped by a country schoolyard full of uniformed students at play and chatted with one of the teachers, who soon recounted the Famine tale of the local couple named Buckley who buried their two children one day and died themselves the next. Their bodies were found in their hovel, her feet still held in his hands as if he were warming them. You can still find the cemetery where the family is said to have been buried along with hundreds of others in mass graves.

On a narrow lane leading out of the village of Ballyvourney I came upon a walking trail into the woods which passed a curious shrine (to Saint Gonnait, I learned, once patron saint of the district) and afforded a view out over the hills and well-tended fields. In this serenity it was impossible to imagine the squalor and deprivation that had consumed the once crowded landscape.

Western civilization constantly tempts us into mourning a faded pastoral world. But you tend to think differently in Ireland, aware of the misery that filled these hills not long ago. Looking around now, at the productive fields and the occasional industrial estate, you may find yourself believing without irony in progress.

The impression may have been as fragile as the beauty of the season, but it seemed—seems—a splendid moment in Irish history, all the better for being quiet, unbloody, uncelebrated.

At any rate, on that benign autumn day I had the sense, rare enough in life, that I was seeing a place that was better than it had been in a very long time. ☘

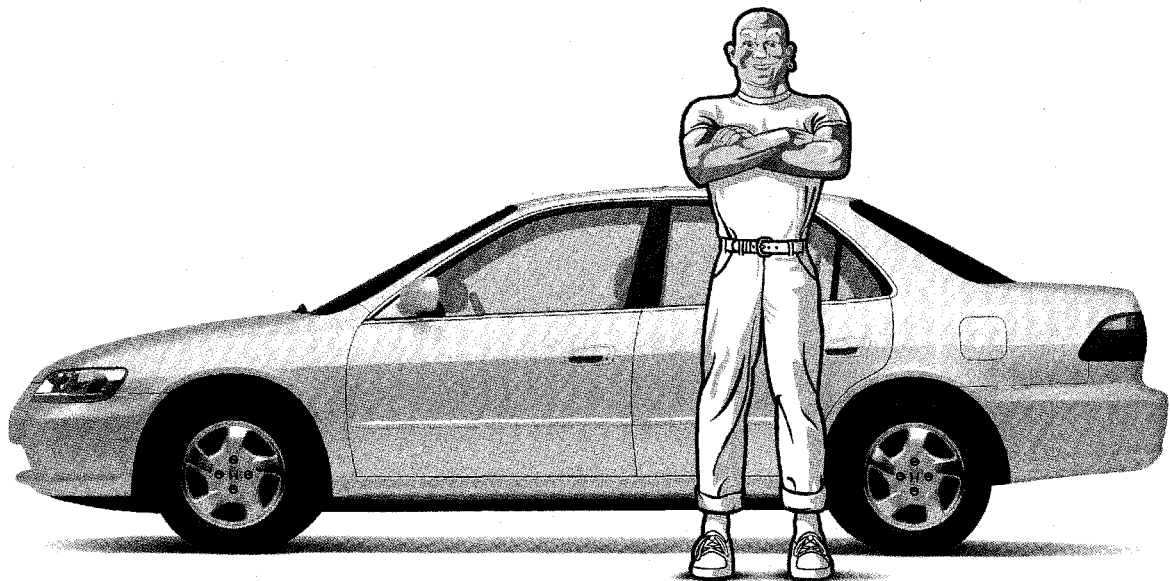
The three hotels I have mentioned, though quite different from one another, have in common a place in Ireland's Blue Book. This is an unusually trustworthy guide to thirty-six country-house hotels and restaurants. It's available free of charge from the Irish Tourist Board, at 345 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10154 (800-223-6470), which can supply a great deal of other touristic information as well.

Kevin Schroeder's walk to the office used to take 25 minutes.
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Travels Into America's Future

by ROBERT D. KAPLAN

MEXICO AND THE SOUTHWEST

A correspondent who has long experience reporting from dimly understood regions of the world reports from his dimly understood native land, and his excursions expose the borderless forces that are pushing America into its next life. Herewith a portion of his travelogue, focusing on the Southwest

I SET out by bus heading northwest from Mexico City. It was the late-summer rainy season; iron clouds hung low over a high and rolling green plateau. Though Mexico does not have the poisoned ugliness of the environmentally ravaged former Soviet Union or the bleak underdevelopment and deforestation of sub-Saharan Africa, the scene I viewed from the window was a familiar Third World one: cratered dirt roads leading off the main highway, overgrown and scruffy greenery, mounds of rotting garbage along the roadside, elevated pipes covered with black tape, cinder-block houses with rocks holding down their corrugated-metal roofs, clothes drying on sagging lines. Puddles were everywhere—the effect of a poor drainage system or none at all.

The route I followed was the one taken by Francisco Vásquez de Coronado, a thirty-year-old Spanish nobleman who had come to Mexico in the wake of Cortez's conquest. That conquest, from 1519 to 1521, had been fraught with mangrove thickets, moldy cassava bread,



human sacrifices, and macabre tropical grandeur. Cortez and his men comprehended little of what they saw, and were not especially curious. These crude zealots massacred Indians, built Christian altars where they had smashed idols, and went mad at the sight of gold, which covered the walls of Montezuma's palace and which they melted down for their own enrichment and to be shipped to Spain. Unlike the children of the European Enlightenment and the Protestant Reformation who settled the east coast of what became the United States, Cortez and his men came to steal, not to work or build cities. Religious dogmatists who combined the worst of Spanish and Moorish

culture, they lacked the habit of *process*, of investing years of labor to achieve material gain—the bourgeois mentality, in other words.

After eight hours the bus reached Guadalajara, and I was grateful for the opportunity to take a walk. Beyond Guadalajara's historic center I saw what a European might notice on a first visit to North America: the flattening



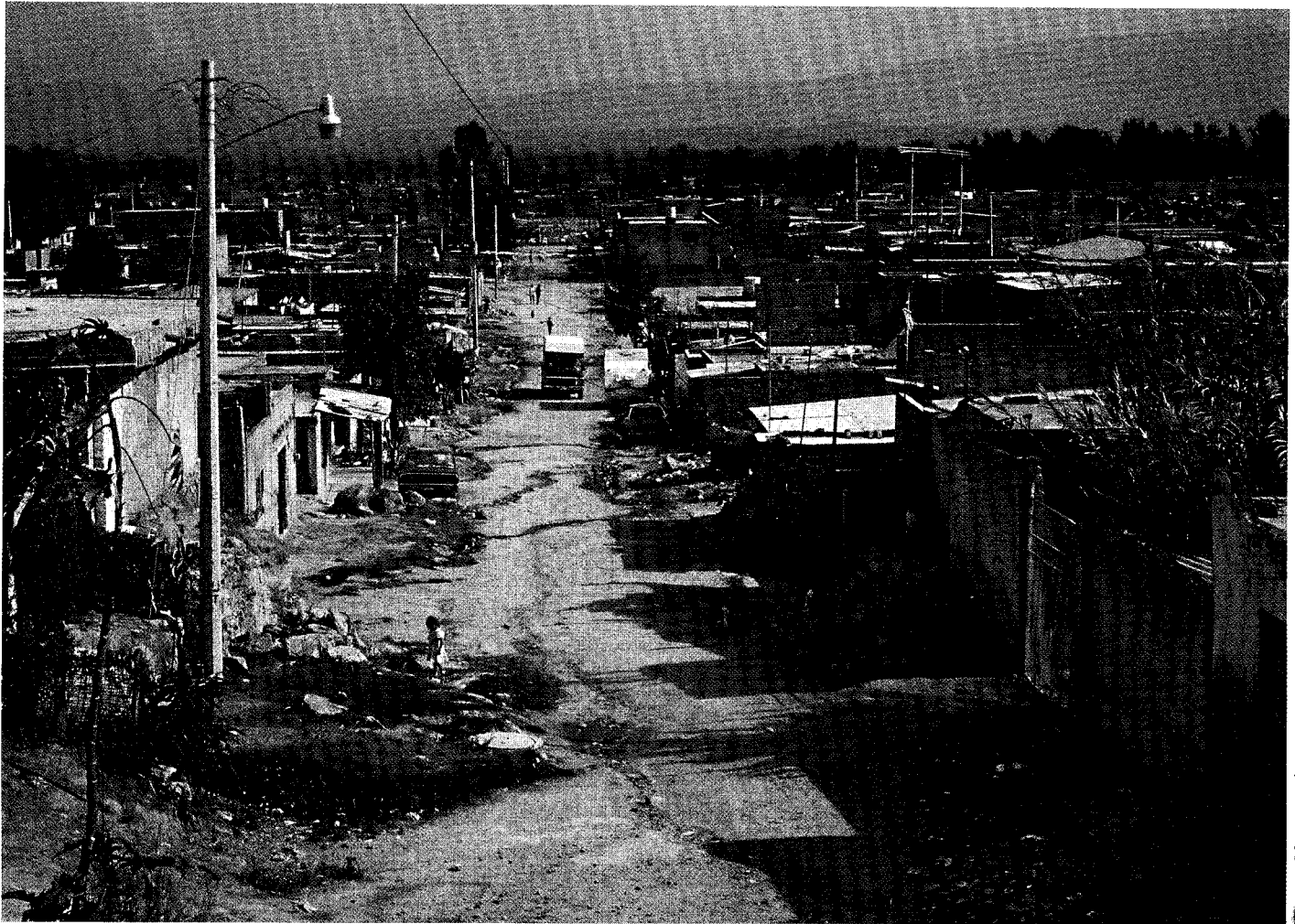
Heading north out of Mexico

out of the urban landscape, with wide streets creating intimidating distances between buildings. There were many fast-food outlets, each with a large parking lot. Even in the vastnesses I had visited in Central Asia, the roads were narrow and people traveled by public bus; and because many of the towns were walkable, there was a vivid sense of huddled-together community. Guadalajara was different. The American-car dealerships and service stations on the city's edge were not the marginalized places they might be in Europe but modern emporiums with snack bars and waiting rooms. On the yawning boulevards men with guns guarded the American Express office and banks. Black graffiti were scrawled over new pink-

On the outskirts of Guadalajara

On went the casual, matter-of-fact dialogue of an American-made karate film being shown in the darkened bus. The passengers read the Spanish subtitles. The bus had left Guadalajara and was continuing northwest. When it slowed to a crawl in the town of Ixtlán del Río, I opened the window curtains and saw dusty streets, broken sidewalks, and windows protected by metal bars; a man in worn and filthy clothes slowly cutting sugarcane; women with plastic buckets waiting in line for water; peeling posters advertising a bullfight; and men partly uniformed and carrying AK-47 assault rifles. On one corner was a white-tiled shrine holding busts of three early-twentieth-century revolutionaries: Francisco Madero, Venustiano Carranza, and Emiliano Zapata. I knew that they had fought one another and that each had been assassinated.

DAVID BUTOW/SABA



adobe houses. The empty and alienating vistas I have seen in some American cities I saw here, too, in the heart of Mexico, whose civilization is under attack from our automobile culture and our appetite for drugs.

"Son of a bitch."

"Jesus Christ."

"Shit."

"Fuck."

Several hours later I got off at Tepic, a city of 240,000 people, and checked into the Hotel Fray Junipero Serra. American rock music blared from the lobby and down the corridors leading to my room. Later, in the hotel restaurant, half a dozen young men in jeans, T-shirts, and Nikes entered. Two of them carried Magnum revolvers, which they carefully placed on the chair cushions and then sat on. They ate a three-course meal without the slightest show of discomfort. Except for me, no one gave them a glance.

The neo-Gothic cathedral across the street was seemingly all that remained of traditional Mexico. Beyond it, stretching in a grid pattern all the way to the surrounding volcanoes, were boxy two- and three-story spray-painted buildings, many of them marred by graffiti. This was a treeless wilderness of broken signs, drooping electric wires, and hard right angles. The Old World had disappeared over the horizon—perhaps in

The historic city center, Guadalajara



ANTONIN KRATOCHVIL/SABA

woman asked in Spanish. She fished out a faded brochure whose one paragraph about Compostela did not mention the Spanish explorer. The past here seemed as blank as the urban landscape. Because so many Mexicans are of mixed Spanish and Indian origin, the attitude toward the Spanish conquerors who massacred Indians is highly ambivalent; like it or not, the Spanish are among America's founding fathers. Few Mexican streets are named for Cortez or Coronado, and relatively little is taught about them in Mexican schools. This denial of an im-

portant part of Mexico's past, in which one line of forebears murdered the other, both complicates and dilutes the meaning of a state that, although officially founded in 1821, grew from the Spanish conquest and the oligarchy it begot. To a great degree that oligarchy still rules, as suggested by the light skins of Mexico's upper class and the brown skins of Mexico's poor.

CULIACÁN, more than 250 miles northwest of Tepic, is the capital of the drug-rich coastal state of Sinaloa. Here Coronado resupplied his army before continuing north. Stepping off the bus, the other passengers and I passed through a metal detector to enter the station. But the policeman on duty was sipping coffee, not paying atten-

Unlike those who settled the east coast of what became the United States, Cortez and his men came to steal, not to work or build cities. Religious dogmatists who combined the worst of Spanish and Moorish culture, they lacked the habit of process, of investing years of labor to achieve material gain.

the historic part of Guadalajara, 140 miles away, with its dignified mustard-yellow archways—and nothing but this architectural bleakness replaced it. Tepic was a town of the new, Third World Sunbelt, punctuated with the worst refuse of American capitalism.

"Compostela, Francisco Vásquez de Coronado?" I inquired at the hotel reception desk. One employee had heard of Compostela, none of Coronado. At the municipal tourist office, too, Coronado was unknown. When I told officials there that the little town of Compostela, forty minutes south of Tepic, was where Coronado, having arrived from Mexico City and Guadalajara, mustered his troops for the exploration of the north, they stared at me incomprehensibly. "Who was he?" a

tion to anyone coming through. In the station more armed policemen were hanging about, as were many young males wearing silver-toed boots.

The temperature of the sidewalks of Culiacán must have been 100°: they *baked*. The smells of urine, frying tortillas, and salsa were sharp and overpowering. Many of the men sported tattoos and baseball caps facing backward. Then there were the pickups: Chevys and Dodge Rams with oversized wheels and high suspensions, fins, ornamental railings, and silver hood ornaments in the shapes of bulls and horses. The pickups were all freshly painted. Published reports on the narcotics trade make it obvious where the money to pay for these vehicles came from. The food stands were filthy, but

near them I saw a hotel, the *Executivo*, with shiny marble in the lobby and credit-card stickers on the door. The gift shop in the lobby sold only key chains, baseball caps, and cheap plastic toys.

Most of the migrants, exports, and cocaine headed for the United States pass through Culiacán and the rest of Sinaloa. A city of 600,000, nicknamed “Little Chicago” in Mexican news reports, Culiacán is the Mexican Cali; it averages several drug-related murders daily. Local folk ballads like “White Load” and “Death of a Snitch” glorify drug kingpins. Nowhere else in the developing world have I seen so many handguns carried by men in civilian clothes.

The most popular religious site in Culiacán is a shrine dedicated to Jesús Malverde, a common criminal hanged in 1909, who is now known as “El Narcosanton”—the Big Narco Saint. Here drug lords come to pray for good fortune. The shrine is built of plate glass, white bathroom tiles, and corrugated sheet metal; it is covered in blue spray paint, tar, and cheap wallpaper, and the walls don’t quite join the sheet-metal roof. The first time I walked past the shrine, which is crammed between two sandy parking lots and obscured by a taco stand, I mistook it for a gas station or an auto-parts shed. When I saw it a second time, I noticed three young men in tight jeans praying before the painted plastic statue of Jesús Malverde, while behind the shrine two men played a sad tune on a bass fiddle and a wheezing accordion. The plastic statue was surrounded by votive candles in red glasses. I bought an amulet containing a picture of the Narco Saint from an old woman. She dipped it in a sink of holy water and passed it over the face and black-painted hair of the statue before handing it to me for the equivalent of five dollars. Meanwhile, a stream of people—young toughs, old women, and children—stopped to pray. The local newspapers said that among the drug traffickers who pray here is Rafael Caro Quintero, who reportedly ordered the 1985 slaying of the American drug agent Enrique Camarena.

Crass and brutal as the shrine is, it is *real*: the poor built it with their bare hands from junk, without planning or authorization, and then filled it with their emotions. The shrine rebukes established aesthetics with its spray paint and gas-station decor—signs of revolt. A hundred yards away is the massive ceramic-and-stone Government Palace of Sinaloa state, with manicured lawns and hundreds of white-collar workers. I saw less energy and spontaneity in that giant building than in the shrine, which could have fit inside just one of the palace’s offices.

As in many of the towns I saw as I closed in on the U.S. border, in Culiacán even the newest poured-concrete and tinted-glass structures looked temporary. This is the *New World*: a land without limits, chronically impermanent, unprotected and unhindered by tradition. In such a vacuum wealth is easily—if too quickly and unequally—created, and drugs are only part of the reason. Sinaloa accounts for a third of Mexico’s sesame-

seed production and three quarters of its soybeans. American businesspeople opening factories crowd Sinaloa’s hotels. Migrants from poorer Mexican provinces seek work in Sinaloa. The drug trade is just another business—another opportunity for those with ambition.

The community here was far from devastated by drugs. Children seemed to have the advantages of family life that many Americans of their age in inner cities do not. I was struck by the pervasiveness of uniformed schoolchildren with backpacks. As I walked along a sun-blasted street suffused with pink light, the cardboard of my notebook damp with sweat inside my pants pocket, I noticed a classroom of children through the rusted grillwork of a window in the brick schoolhouse, some raising their hands to answer the teacher’s questions and some writing quietly in their exercise books. At a nearby candy store locals of several generations gathered to buy knickknacks, exchange gossip, and, in the case of the children, play games. In a transnational North America of ten or twenty years from now, will these children be competing with less competent, and less determined, Americans of their own generation?

Whereas Americans quickly notice the sleazy aspect of Mexico’s border towns, they may be less aware that an aggressive middle class is burgeoning in cities like Culiacán, Guadalajara, and Mexico City. If central authority in Mexico continues to break down and more members of that middle class decide to head north, they will not face the same racial barriers that blacks do. In the municipal park of Culiacán, not fifty feet from where hoodlums with tattoos and beepers were having their silver-toed boots shined while they talked on cellular phones, I saw several neatly dressed teenage couples, holding hands, who looked straight out of Orange County or some other part of suburban California.

To pigeonhole Culiacán as a drug depot is to miss the point. The multibillion-dollar narcotics trade in Mexico is too vast to be dismissed as “illegal.” Even if legal business is growing and helping to create a solid middle class, the drug trade is the heart of the Mexican economy. It constitutes the principal economic fact of life for the southern part of North America at the turn of the twenty-first century—the subterranean aspect of North American free trade that does not require treaties or congressional approval. The narcotics trade indicates as much about the social fiber of the United States (where the market is) as about Mexico, where young men on the make are responding to consumer demand in ways that both challenge and further corrupt an already imploding political power structure. I walked around frequently at night in Culiacán, when the candles burned bright at the crowded shrine of El Narcosanton. Dangerous as Culiacán was by Mexican standards, it was safe by those of many American cities. For me, Mexico’s Cali was also a civil society, whose growing middle class will increasingly be pursuing opportunities in the United States.

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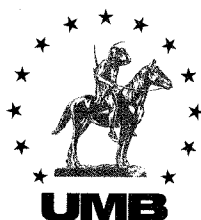
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The Rusted Iron Curtain

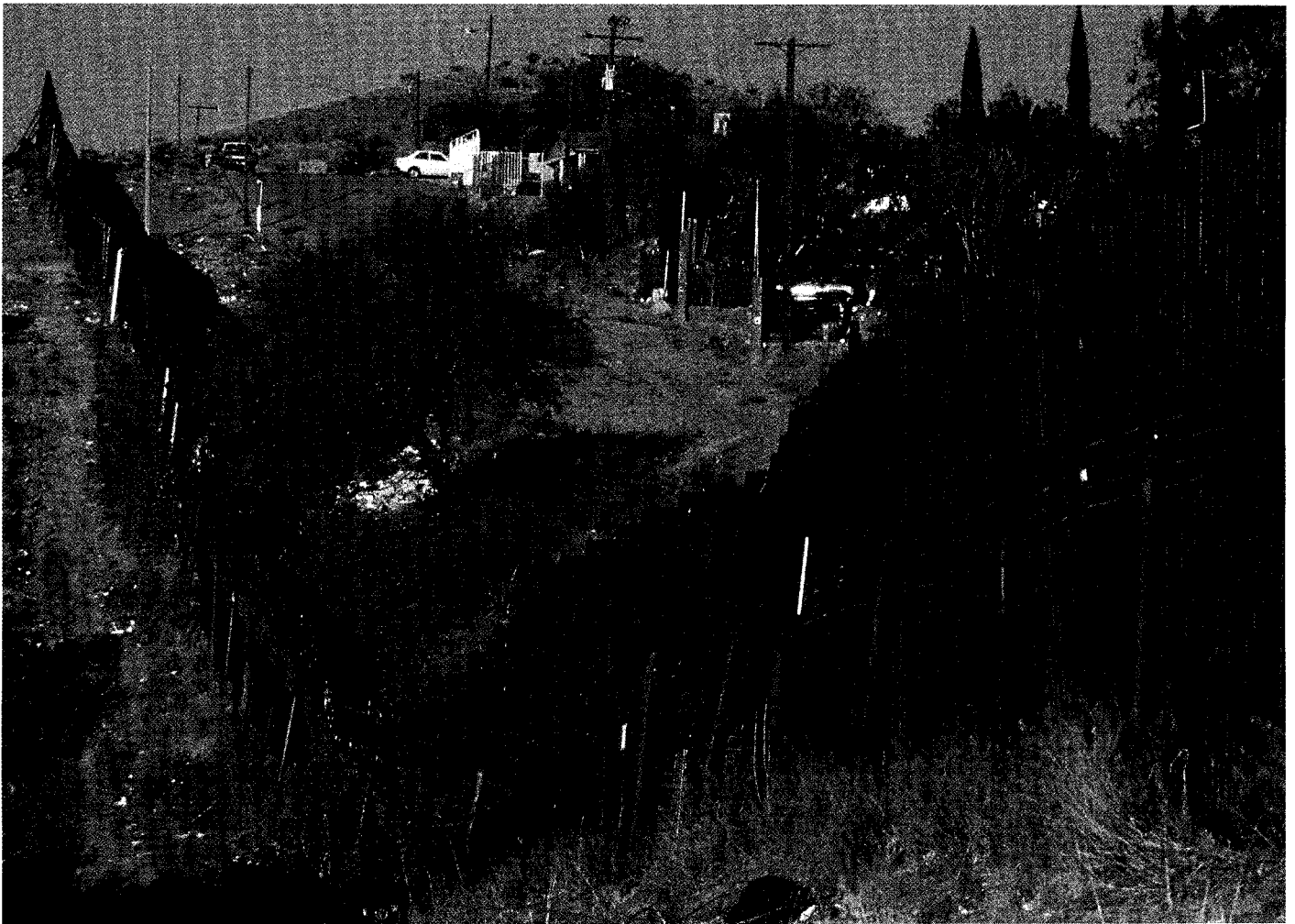
HAT we call "the border" has always been a wild and unstable swath of desert, hundreds of miles wide—a region that the Aztecs, cruel as they were, could not control, that the Apaches brutalized in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century raids, and where U.S. soldiers unsuccessfully chased the bandit revolutionary Pancho Villa.

My bus came around a low rise, and a long, narrow belt of factories and shanties stretched out almost to the horizon between brown hills studded with juniper and sagebrush. This was the border town of Nogales, a crowded warren of distempered stucco façades spray-painted with swastikas and graffiti.

Not all the workers find jobs, and the migration has spawned shantytowns and violent crime, drug and alcohol abuse, class conflict, and the breakup of families. Both rape and car accidents are more common in the north than in the rest of Mexico. More than 2,000 companies opened factories in this region from the late sixties to the mid-nineties, resulting in what the American Medical Association has labeled a "cesspool" of polluted air, contaminated groundwater and surface water, unsanitary waste dumps, and other health and environmental problems associated with uncontrolled urban growth. The abandonment of subsistence farming by workers in search of better-paying manufacturing jobs is a latter-day gold rush—ugly upheaval and bright promise—but on a vast scale and likely to be permanent.

Many of our microwave ovens, televisions, VCRs, toasters,

PORTER GIFFORD/GAMMA LIAISON



In Nogales, looking into Mexico

ti, of broken plastic-and-neon signs, of garish wall drawings of the Flintstones and other television icons. Among the façades were the industrial *maquiladora* plants I had heard about—plants that attract blue-collar workers from throughout Mexico, who assemble American-made parts into products exported to the United States.

toys, and everyday clothes are made by Mexican laborers in border towns like this one. They earn three to five dollars a day—not an hour but a day!—and as Charles Bowden, an expert and writer on Mexico and the U.S. Southwest, notes, they work in conditions that are often dangerous because of pollution and toxic chemicals. American consumers are now in a tight political and economic relationship with Third World workers. This close relationship is also oligarchic, and not

much different from that between the citizens of ancient Athens or Rome and their slaves.

I checked into a hotel and then walked toward the border, where I watched two boys kick a soccer ball made of rags until one of them kicked the ball onto a scrap-metal roof. When the ball failed to roll back down, the boys walked away. I saw a group of teenagers with hair cut in punk styles and dyed primary colors, wearing expensive leather belts, winter ski hats, and summer shorts—anything they could get their hands on. Their expressions were untamed. A hundred yards from the border began a concentration of scrap-metal storefronts, offering every manner of souvenir and after-hours activity, including off-track betting. Here were crowds of destitute people reeking of alcohol. Edward Gibbon wrote in *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* that the fifth-century Goths “imbibed the vices, without imitating the arts and institutions, of civilised [Roman] society.” What I saw at the border is nothing new.

The actual border, on International Street, was at the time of my visit a twelve-foot-high, darkly rusted iron curtain, constructed by the American authorities from scraps of metal that the U.S. Army used in the Persian Gulf War. (It has since been partly replaced by a new wall.) Walking back from the border I saw the neat squares and rectangular roofs of houses high on the hills of the American side, where it was obvious that every joint fit and that every part was standardized, in contrast to the amateurish and inspired constructions all around me.

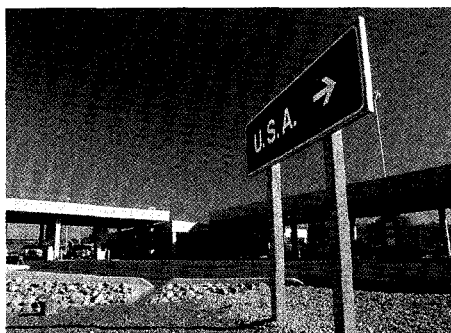
Though here, in the middle of a city, the border looked forbidding, out in the desert it ebbs to a few strands of barbed wire, which work to keep only cattle from migrating. Along the narrow Rio Grande in Texas, where there is no fence at all, or any natural obstruction, no mountain range or wide, surging river, the border is highly penetrable. The military radar used by U.S. border guards is like a penlight in a dark forest, as William Langewiesche has written (see “The Border,” May and June, 1992, *Atlantic*). An artificial, purely legal construct, the border has for several centuries been an unruly and politically ambiguous “brown zone” where civilizations—Spanish and Anglo, Athapaskan-speaking Indians from the Arctic and Aztecans from southern Mexico—mingle.

The factors that have kept Mexico at bay—drug profits and the wages of illegal aliens—stem from the very activities that Washington claims it wants to stop. Without the drug trade and illegal migration the United States would face what it has always feared: a real revolution in Mexico and true chaos on the border. To deprive Mexico of its largest sources of income

would hasten the collapse of its already weak central authority. Indeed, by supporting the Mexican economy, America’s appetite for marijuana and cocaine protects against a further flood of immigrants from a contiguous, troubled, and ever more populous Third World country.

The unpalatable truth about Mexico is its intractability—the intractability of an ancient “hydraulic” civilization, like Egypt’s, China’s, and India’s, in which the need to build great water and earth works (Mexico has both canal systems and pyramids) led to a vast, bureaucratic tyranny. Centuries of what Karl Marx called “oriental despotism” have imprinted the political culture, despite the influence of a great democratic civilization to the north. And it is not clear that our influence on Mexico is beneficial. Our appetite for drugs may be turning this ancient non-Western civilization into an amoral yet dynamic beast of the twenty-first century.

Meanwhile, integration proceeds irreversibly. Vectors of binationalhood have emerged between Phoenix and Guaymas, Tucson and Los Mochis, Dallas and Chihuahua City, in which prosperous Mexicans and Americans commute back and forth by air. North America’s geographic destiny may be no longer east to west but one in which the arbitrary lines separating us from Mexico and Canada disappear, even as relations between



THIS PAGE: PORTER GIFFORD/GAMMA LIAISON

Entering the United States, Nogales

the East Coast and Europe, the West Coast and Asia, and the Southwest and Mexico all intensify. Is our border with Mexico like the Great Wall of China—a barrier built in the desert to keep out Turkic tribesmen which, as Gibbon wrote, held “a conspicuous place in the map of the world” but “never contributed to the safety” of the Chinese?

"Ambos Nogales"

I HAD crossed the Berlin Wall several times during the Communist era. I had crossed the border from Iraq to Iran illegally, with Kurdish rebels. I had crossed from Jordan to Israel and from Pakistan to India in the 1970s, and from Greek Cyprus to Turkish Cyprus in the 1980s. In 1983, coming from Damascus, I had walked up to within a few yards of the first Israeli soldier in the demilitarized zone on the Golan Heights. But never in my life had I experienced such a sudden transition as when I crossed from Nogales, Sonora, to Nogales, Arizona.

Surrounded by beggars on the broken sidewalk of Mexican Nogales, I stared at Old Glory snapping in the breeze over two white McDonald's-like arches, which marked the international crossing point. Cars waited in inspection lanes. To the left of the car lanes was the pedestrian crossing point, in a small building constructed by the U.S. government. Merely by touching the door handle one entered a new physical world.

The solidly constructed handle with its high-quality metal, the clean glass, and the precise manner in which the room's ceramic tiles were fitted—each the same millimetric distance from the next—seemed a marvel to me after the chaos of Mexican construction. There were only two other people in the room: an immigration official, who checked identification documents before their owners passed through a metal detector; and a customs official, who stood by the luggage x-ray machine. They were both quiet. In government enclosures of that size in Mexico and other places in the Third World, I remembered crowds of officials and hangers-on engaged in animated discussion while sipping tea or coffee. Looking at the car lanes, I saw how few people there were to garrison the border station and yet how efficiently it ran.

I gave the immigration official my U.S. passport. She glanced up at me and asked how long I had been in Mexico. I told her several weeks. She asked, "Why so long?" I explained that I was a journalist. She handed back my passport. With her eyes she motioned me through the metal detector. The customs official did not ask me to put my rucksack through the machine. U.S. Customs works on "profiles," and I evidently did not look suspect. Less than sixty seconds after walking through the glass doors on the Mexico side, I entered the United States.

The billboards, sidewalks, traffic markers, telephone cables, and so on all appeared straight, and all the curves and angles uniform. The standardization made for a cold and alienating landscape after what I had grown used to in Mexico. The store logos were made of expensive polymers rather than cheap plastic. I heard no metal rattling in the wind. The cars were the same makes I had seen in Mexico, but *oh*, were they different: no chewed-up, rusted bodies, no cracked windshields held together by black tape, no good-luck charms hanging inside the windshields, no noise from broken mufflers.

The taxi I entered had shock absorbers. The neutral-gray upholstery was not ripped or shredded. The meter printed out receipts. As I sank into the soft upholstery for the ride to the hotel, I felt as though I had entered a protective, ordered bubble—not just the taxi but this whole new place.

The Plaza Hotel in Nogales, Sonora, and the Americana Hotel in Nogales, Arizona, both charged \$50 for a single room. But the Mexican hotel, only two years old, was already falling apart—doors didn't close properly, paint was cracking, walls were beginning to stain. The American hotel was a quarter century old and in excellent condition, from the fresh paint to the latest-model fixtures. The air-conditioning was quiet, not clanking loudly as in the hotel across the border. There was no mold or peeling paint in the swimming pool outside my window. The tap water was potable. Was the developed world, I wondered, defined not by its riches but by maintenance?

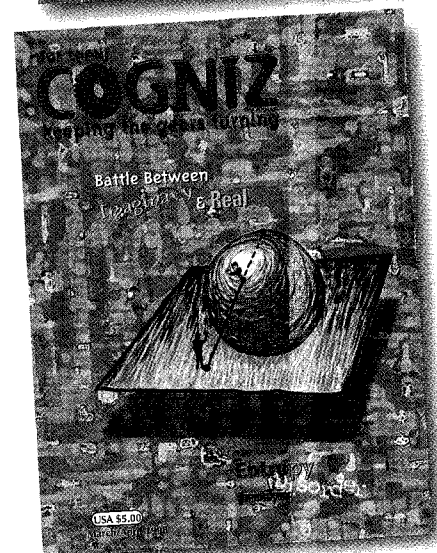
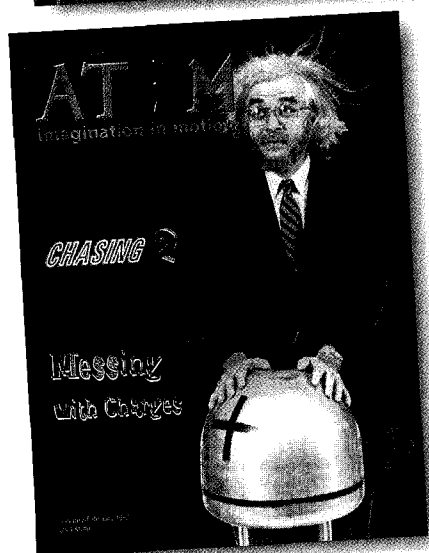
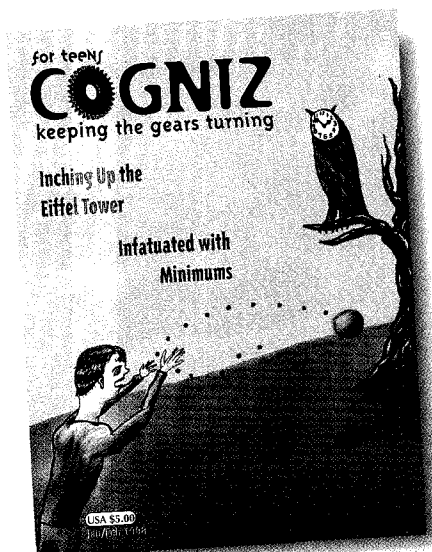
As I walked around Nogales, Arizona, I saw a way of doing things, different from Mexico's, that had created material wealth. This was not a matter of Anglo culture per se, since 95 percent of the population of Nogales, Arizona, is Spanish-speaking and of Mexican descent. Rather, it was a matter of the national culture of the United States, which that day in Nogales seemed to me sufficiently robust to absorb other races, ethnicities, and languages without losing its distinctiveness.

The people I saw on the street were in most instances speaking Spanish, but they might as well have been speaking English. Whether it was the quality of their clothes, the purposeful stride that indicated they were going somewhere rather than just hanging out, the absence of hand movements when they talked, or the impersonal and mechanical friendliness of their voices when I asked directions, they seemed to me thoroughly modern compared with the Spanish-speakers over in Sonora. The sterility, dullness, and predictability I observed on the American side of the border—every building part in its place—were signs of economic efficiency.

Though the term "*ambos Nogales*" ("both Nogaleses") asserts a common identity, the differences between the two towns are basic. Nogales, Arizona, has only 21,000 residents, a fairly precise figure; nobody in Nogales, Sonora, has any idea how many people live there—the official figure is 138,000, but I heard unofficial ones as high as 300,000. Here the streets were quiet and spotless, with far fewer people and cars than in Mexico. Distances, as a consequence, seemed vast. Taxis did not prowl the streets, and thus I was truly stranded without a car. I had reached a part of the earth where business is not conducted in public, so street life was sparse.

When the English and other Northern European settlers with their bourgeois values swept across this mainly uninhabited land, they swept away the past; technology and the use of capital have determined everything since. Because subsequent immigrants sought opportunity, the effect of periodic waves of immigration has been to erase the past again and again, replacing one technology with another. Economic efficiency, as

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these streets in Nogales, Arizona, proclaimed, is everything in America. Liberals may warn against social Darwinism, but the replacement of obsolete technology and the jobs and social patterns that go with it are what our history has always been about, and immigrants want it that way. For them it means liberation: the chance to succeed or fail, and to be judged purely on their talents and energy and good fortune.

fresh from Mexico, I gawked at the prosperity. I thought of the tens of millions of poor people just on the other side of the iron curtain thirty minutes to the south—so much younger than the population on this side of the border. In Mexico 40 percent of the population is under fifteen, whereas in this part of Arizona the median age is thirty-three and rising. If the history of migration is a guide, borders like this one, not based on geo-

When I entered the United States, the billboards, sidewalks, traffic markers, and telephone cables suddenly all appeared straight. The standardization made for an alienating landscape after what I had grown used to. The cars were the same makes I had seen in Mexico, but *oh*, were they different.

In Mexico the post offices looked as if they had just been vacated, with papers askew and furniture missing. In Nogales, Arizona, the Spanish voices in the post office were the last thing I noticed; what struck me immediately was the evenly stacked printed forms, the big wall clock that worked, the bulletin board with community advertisements in neat columns, the people waiting quietly in line, and a policeman standing slightly hunched over in the corner, carefully going through his paperwork, unlike the leering, swaggering policemen I had seen in Mexico.

The silent streets of Nogales, Arizona, with their display of noncoercive order and industriousness, cast the United States in a different light not only from Mexico but from many of the other countries I had seen in my travels. Nogales, Arizona, demonstrated just how insulated America has been—thus far, at least.

Tucson North and South

INTERSTATE 19 from Nogales to Tucson is a typical American four-lane highway, with luminous metallic signs and landscaped roadsides and without the mud puddles and trails of garbage that begin an inch from the road in Mexico. My bus passed through Green Valley, a high-income retirement community with Spanish archways and upscale mini-malls. Still

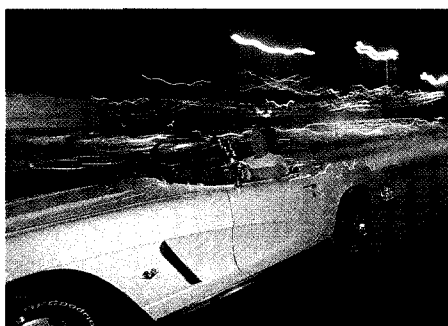
graphic barriers, may slow and interrupt great movements of humanity but ultimately will not stop them.

A pitiless gray cluster of sun-beaten escarpments—the Santa Catalina Mountains to the north, the Tucson Mountains to the west, and the Rincon Mountains to the east—announced Tucson. With a population of 465,000, Tucson is larger than Atlanta, Miami, St. Louis, Minneapolis, Pittsburgh, or Cincinnati. Eighty-five percent of Arizonans live either in greater Tucson or in greater Phoenix. By the middle of the next century 98 percent of Arizonans will live in just four cities: Tucson, Phoenix, Flagstaff, and Yuma. (Greater Tucson already has a population of

817,000.) The Arizona pattern suggests what is happening throughout the West, as small towns die and suburbs around big cities grow by an acre an hour. Despite its mythic grandeur, the West is actually the most urbanized part of the United States.

After the Second World War the “Sunbelt” phenomenon, made possible by the spread of air-conditioning, led to a land boom in Tucson. The city’s population grew from 35,000 in 1940 to 212,000 in 1960. In the 1980s and 1990s, as the communications revolution took off, Tucson’s warm and scenic desert location became especially appealing. The population, which grew by 26 percent in the 1970s, has risen by an additional 34 percent since, according to city officials. Many who live here do business with regional or even global clientele—in the Catalina foothills in north Tucson an elite conducts daily business electronically with other continents. Other newcomers are prosperous retirees with independent incomes. Thus the lo-

NORMA JEAN GARGASZ



Speedway Boulevard, Tucson

cal economy has not kept pace with the population, and now there are two Tucson. Aside from the University of Arizona—somewhat of a social and economic island—and boom-and-bust military-aircraft industries, little is here except low-paying service jobs and a millionaire elite that acquired its wealth by sitting on real estate rather than producing anything.

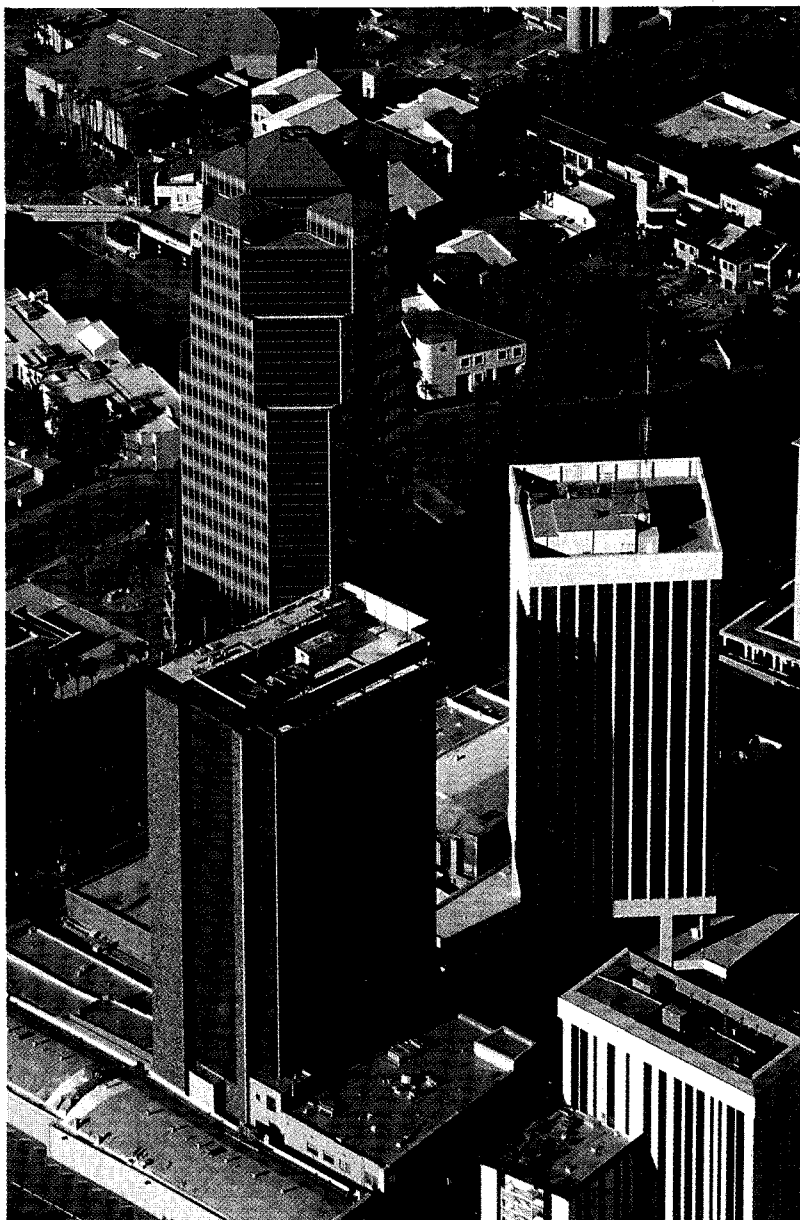
My bus entered a gridwork of dead space: mile upon yawning mile of strip malls with no edifice more than two stories high, each with a parking lot: Arby's Roast Beef, Yokohama Rice Bowl, Lube Pit, Jack in the Box, Denny's, Exxon, Discount Tire, Quik Mart, McDonald's, Whataburger, Foodmart, Dunkin' Donuts, Bank One, Taco Bell, and on and on. There was an ordered repetition: every few miles another Yokohama Rice Bowl, another Arby's and Bank One. What seemed an unending sameness was a series of interconnected shopping centers serving individual neighborhoods, often cookie-cutter subdivisions of single-level, cheaply framed Sheetrock houses: "three houses to an acre, ticky-tacky junk," according to a local planner.

I tried to remember the sequence of the bus's ninety-degree turns, but soon lost all sense of direction, since nothing seemed to change—as if I were inside the circuitry of a computer chip. Later, when I picked up a rental car and looked briefly at a city map, I saw that except in the hilly northern suburbs, there were no winding streets to confuse me. The city is a military-style, 200-square-mile cantonment whose central thoroughfare—named Speedway—is a multi-lane highway. Tucson appeared truly futuristic, a deliberate pod—a kind of self-enclosed, technologically sophisticated community that may well be more closely connected to similar ones in Asia than to neighboring towns. Partly because of the surrounding mountains and clean air, Tucson still evinces a Wild West quaintness. Nearby greater Phoenix is four times as large. Its growth faces no natural limits, and it has some of the dirtiest air in the nation.

What little there was to Tucson's downtown was near the bus station: a few empty streets with brick-fronted stores selling T-shirts, Native American and Indian-subcontinent fabrics, leather-and-chain apparel, some traditional clothes, and trite western-landscape paintings. Much of the merchandise had a faded hippie look. Some of the stores were closed, opening only on weekend nights, when the streets fill with students from the university, though they have little disposable income. Roy Drachman, who has lived in Tucson for all of his ninety years and has been one of the city's leading real-estate developers since the Second World War, told me that although he leads an active life, he hasn't been downtown in years. "There are no

good restaurants or anything worthwhile, and I wouldn't feel safe there at night."

Tucson is an oasis culture located in the desert along the Rillito and Santa Cruz Rivers—shallow, dry washes that fill with gushing brown water after a heavy rain. It is a city of nomads, both rich and poor, in which much of the population struggles at subsistence level. "Tucson is generally a minimum-wage town," Charles Bowden, who has written nine



NORMA JEAN GARCIA

Office towers, downtown Tucson

books about the Southwest, told me. "It has the American equivalent of a *maquiladora* economy."

It is said that many of the people who live in Tucson have come here just to be left alone. Involvement in local politics is abysmal, with a voter turnout of 25 to 30 percent in off-year elections—one of the lowest in the United States. Relatively few people are on the streets. There are few sidewalks, and almost

no taxis. It is a city of beepers, car phones, and private security systems. The impression of many people here is that the local business elite is disappearing as an increasing number of Tucson's retail outlets give way to chain stores. The crime index is the ninth highest among large U.S. cities, after Tampa, Miami, St. Louis, Atlanta, Baton Rouge, Newark, Baltimore, and Kansas City. There is almost no urban planning.

"In many neighborhoods people don't stay long enough to build community ties," Tom Sheridan, an anthropologist at the University of Arizona, told me. "It is a Sunbelt phenomenon of people in transit. Still, neighborhood associations are more vibrant in Tucson than in Phoenix, where seven out of ten newcomers leave sooner or later." The West is the most mobile region in the nation (followed by the South), with a fifth of all households having moved in the previous year. In Tucson almost 30 percent of households have lived in their homes less than fifteen months, about 60 percent less than five years.

"Since 1980 there has been a real decline in community life," Molly McKasson, a Tucson city councilwoman, told me. "Despite the massive growth and development of the 1980s, the median household income here declined by eight percent, the unemployment rate rose by twenty-eight percent, the number of people living in poverty increased by sixty-eight percent, and we are close to being a renter economy: almost fifty percent of people here rent rather than own their homes."

The median household income in Tucson is \$21,748, whereas it was \$26,655 in 1970 (in the same dollars). The median income for a single woman with children is \$14,595. More than a third of Tucson households earn less than \$15,000. "Do you realize how low these numbers are?" McKasson asked me. "These women can't afford day care; their kids are left alone during the day. And these are the people above poverty! All the stress indicators are up. There is an increase in transiency, in single motherhood, in renters, in child abuse, in juvenile crime." Most of McKasson's figures are slightly below the national average. The social crisis affects the black, white, and Mexican communities to similar degrees.

The Southwest is full of such oases: low-wage, one-story encampments containing a high proportion of drifters and broken families. The drug-arrest rate is higher in the West than anywhere else in the country.

WHEREAS north Tucson is mainly white, Tucson's "South Side" is mainly Mexican (with both legal and illegal immigrants), and crime-ridden. Arturo Carillo Strong, a retired Tucson policeman and federal undercover agent, gave me a tour of the South Side one morning. (Strong recently died.)

"Over there," Strong said, pointing to some stately brick ranch houses with iron fences, "you see your drug money at work. Just look at that fancy wrought-iron fence—you know it was paid for by drugs by the amount of wrought iron in the construction." Strong's tour began in Barrio Centro and continued

into Barrio Hollywood and El Rio. I was struck by the sterility of the South Side. Nothing indicated that this was a dangerous area in which most of Tucson's seventy-five known gangs operate. When Strong told me about the drive-by shootings and the crack houses, I was truly surprised: I saw well-maintained tract houses with metal or asphalt roofs and white-painted brick; some even had gardens of bougainvillea and oleander, despite the arid desert soil. The only hints of working-class poverty were old pickups and the occasional sagging clothesline. "The parents or the grandparents are okay, but some of the kids are bad," Strong explained. "The grandparents tend the garden and make repairs—that's why it looks nice."

We passed a lovely landscaped park with cypress trees. "It's full of drug dealers at night," Strong said. "They have whistlers—guys who hang out at the corner and whistle if they see someone strange approaching."

In another park Strong pointed to some homeless people. "The police provide a number of one-way bus tickets to these people, to get them to San Diego, where they will be San Diego's problem. The police and social-service departments do that sort of thing. Forget solutions—just keep criminal activity at a reasonable level in your jurisdiction."

We passed through a section of town where restored adobe houses were undergoing gentrification by yuppies. I noticed a handmade sign: WE NEED AFFORDABLE HOUSING—NOT \$1,800-A-MONTH RENTS. IF YOU PEOPLE WANT NEW YORK-STYLE LOFTS, WHY DON'T YOU MOVE TO NEW YORK?

I saw evidence of class resentment, violence, and a social vacuum. Yet Strong's cynicism did not persuade me that Tucson was in danger. I knew that for the prosperous inhabitants of the Catalina foothills, where I was staying, the South Side simply did not exist.

We entered a section of town composed of tire shops, auto-transmission stores, and Mexican restaurants. "Tire shops have traditionally been fronts for drug deals, or for laundering illegal cash," Strong said. "Arrest all the drug dealers and the retail economy of Tucson's South Side goes bust." The clumsy architecture and the graffiti made me feel that I was back in northern Mexico—a perception that strengthened when Strong and I entered El Indio restaurant, a local hangout, formerly a beauty salon. Here Strong introduced me to Alex Villa, a "semi-retired" local gang leader.

Villa said that he was semi-retired because his younger brother had taken over the leadership of the gang. "But two rival gangs still want my head as a trophy on the wall." Villa weighed nearly 300 pounds, I thought. His head was completely shaved, and he had a black goatee. His sunglasses rested on a bulge at the back of his neck, making him look as if he had two faces. Around his neck was a gold necklace with a pendant of Jesus Christ the Fisherman of Souls. "Who else is going to keep me alive?" Villa said when I commented on it.

"What's a gang?" I asked him.

Villa stared at me, very hard. After a moment of silence he

TECHNOLOGY UPDATE

One scientist's vision revolutionizes the hearing industry, benefiting millions of people...

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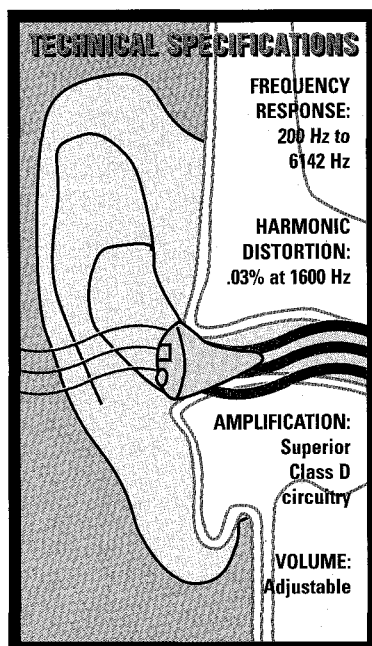
by Harold Sturman

One day a friend asked my wife Jill if I had a hearing aid. "He certainly does," replied Jill, "Me!" After hearing about a remarkable new product, Jill finally got up the nerve to ask me if I'd ever thought about getting a hearing aid. "No way," I said. "It would make me look 20 years older and cost a fortune." "No, no," she replied. "This is entirely different. It's not a hearing aid...it's Crystal Ear!"

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most cases it goes completely untreated. For many millions of people, hearing devices are way too expensive, and the retail middlemen want to keep it that way. What's more, treating hearing loss the old retail way can involve numerous office visits, expensive testing and adjustments to fit your ear. Thanks to Crystal Ear, the "sound solution" is now affordable and convenient. Almost 90% of people with mild hearing loss, and millions more with just a little hearing dropoff, can be dramatically helped with Crystal Ear. Plus, its superior design is energy-efficient, so batteries can last months, not just weeks.

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said, "A gang enforces order from chaos. A gang is about pride and respect, while mafias are all about business. Only if a gang achieves a certain level of organization can it become a mafia. In Tucson, gangs are more territorial than ethnic. For instance, there are often some blacks and whites in Mexican gangs. Black-dominated gangs tend to be more fluid, though, with less loyalty and more 'flippers.' The Phoenix gangs are allied with the [Los Angeles-based] Crips and Bloods, while the gangs here are independent of—yet still influenced by—the L.A. gangs.

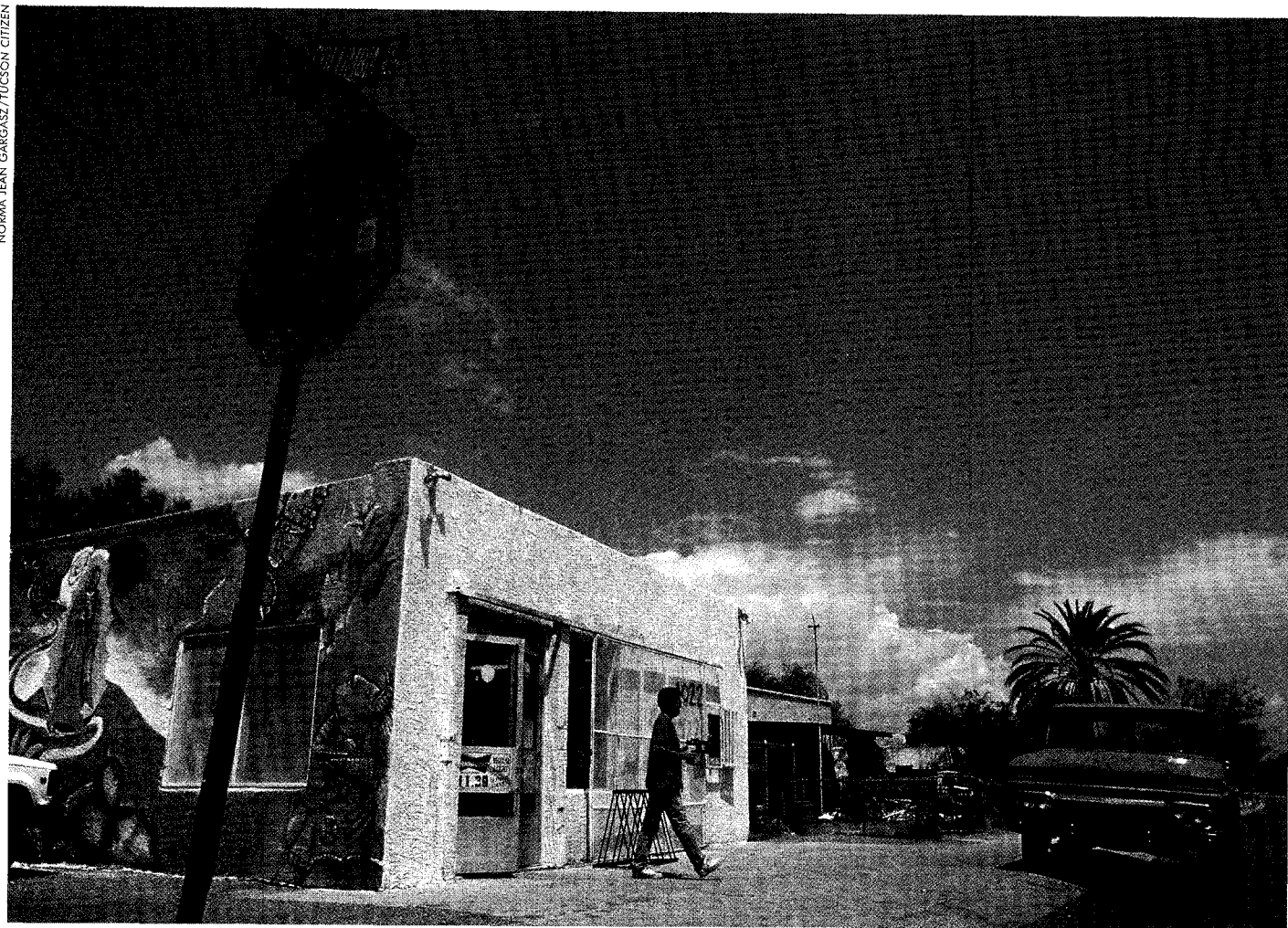
"The schools have made things worse. In high school, in the Mexican areas we were taught about Latino history and pride, while the blacks were taught about black history and pride. What the teachers never emphasized was respect for each other's cultures, or how to think like an American. My

at me hard, and then said, "You cannot believe how easy it is to be trapped by your surroundings, how the world beyond the South Side of Tucson is not real. When I was in criminal court, I listened—really, for the first time—to how educated people speak. That's when I realized how dumb I sounded. Thanks for the compliment. I'm still working on myself."

Villa told me that he reads often in libraries. "I've learned to start sentences without saying 'You know.'" He had arrived on time for our lunch—but for gang members it is a matter of pride to arrive late, to let the other fellow wait. I suspected that he was truly retired.

Villa had served a total of sixteen months, in a juvenile prison and in what he called an adult facility, for assault and battery. "In the adult facility I learned how to hot-wire cars,

NORMA JEAN GARGASZ / TUCSON CITIZEN



Barrio Hollywood, in Tucson's South Side

sophomore year blacks and Mexicans had a full-fledged riot."

"What about your old gang?"

"It's a subcell of what had been a larger gang." Villa went on, talking about gang "empires" and "territories," including one controlled by Yaqui Indians—"tough little guys whose territory was surrounded, yet they were able to hold off other groups."

"You don't talk like you look," I remarked. Villa again stared

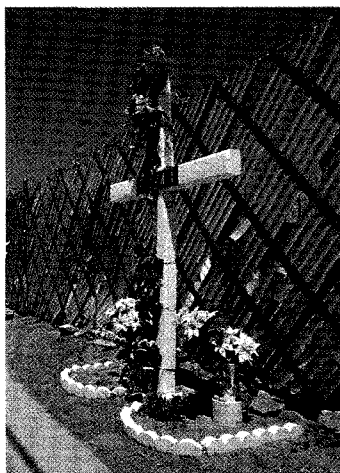
get through home alarm systems, and make silencers," he said. He told me about "night crawlers"—gang lookouts who flash Bic cigarette lighters to indicate Tucson street corners where cocaine is for sale. I was also told by people in the area that cops are protected by gang members if "they let a certain amount of crime happen."

Villa is a third-generation Mexican-American, born December 30, 1969. "I was a tax deduction," he joked. His now deceased father was a roofer, his mother a medical assistant.

"Because of my size, I was a natural leader in junior high school. Gangs are the most copycat of subcultures. It used to be zoot suits; now it's tattoos. When I was thirteen, I got a tattoo"—he pulled up his T-shirt and showed me a big tattoo, which read CHICANO—"so the other kids had to get a tattoo also." Villa continued, broadening the picture. "If you chicken out when it comes to committing a murder, all your friends from your entire life in the neighborhood will reject you—it's like excommunication. Tell me, what law or punishment could be worse than that, especially since none of the hard-core gang members expect to live beyond twenty-one?"

According to Alex Villa, the real Mexican-U.S. border runs between south and north Tucson. "The South Side is the Old World. In the Old World if a car passed by floating on air, people would fear it, then worship it. In the New World they would dissect it to see how it works. In the Old World, even with the worst poverty, there is an extended family which provides stability. But in the New World, if there is no economy, there is no culture either, no family, nothing to hold people together. Just look at the poor whites and blacks. For South Side Mexicans to go into north Tucson for work is a death march. They hate north Tucson and envy it at the same time. South Side Mexicans have no idea of gradually accumulating wealth. What they know from their own experience is 'If I could only sell a bunch of keys [kilos of cocaine], I could move to north Tucson.' To think in terms

gangs is to legalize drugs—at least marijuana. Then the gangs would have much less money to buy guns."



*Gang-victim memorial,
Tucson*

NORMA JEAN GARGASZ

TUCSON'S crime-plagued South Side is composed of the "working poor." Official poverty levels are meaningless. In fact, from a fifth to a quarter of all Americans depend on incomes that cannot realistically provide for the basic necessities; and white males make up the largest group of employed heads of households living in or near poverty—a fact that partly explains the resurgence of militias. Bruce and Corinna Chadwick, who live in Tucson's South Side in a predominantly black and Mexican area, are members of the part of the white population that can be counted among the working poor. Bruce is a supervisor in an automobile-parts store, Corinna a store cashier. Neither finished high school. In their late twenties, with three children, they have a combined gross income of \$35,000 a year. Although that is higher than the Tucson household average of \$21,748, the Chadwicks are barely managing to tread water economically.

I pulled my car up to the Chadwicks' tract house with its bare-dirt yard, enclosed by a fence and protected by a loud buzzer and two guard dogs. Bruce came to greet me. I noticed that a black-iron-grille door had been installed over the original one. Inside I saw a spotlessly clean, frugal house, with

For the prosperous inhabitants of Tucson's Catalina foothills, in mainly white north Tucson, the crime-ridden, mainly Mexican "South Side" simply does not exist. According to Alex Villa, a "semi-retired" local gang leader, the real Mexican-U.S. border runs between south and north Tucson.

of education and hard work as a way into north Tucson is, in fact, to buy into America. I know almost nobody in south Tucson who has bought into America."

"What about the war against drugs?" I asked.

"There's no sign of it in south Tucson. Coke and heroin are on the rise, weed's the staple diet. I see more guys with exotic cars and beepers, whispering on cellular phones while the cops do nothing. Maybe the only way to cut the power of the

flowers stuck in a plastic 7-Eleven cup on the kitchen table. Bruce and Corinna were both heavyset. Bruce had dark hair, a neat moustache, and wire-rimmed glasses; Corinna had long red hair and red fingernails. They were sipping Cokes. It was mid-morning, and their three children were at school—a magnet school in a better neighborhood, where Corinna had managed to enroll them. "I attended school in this neighborhood, and I don't want my kids exposed to the same things I was,"

she said. Bruce and Corinna are intelligent people who made, economically speaking, a mistake: they married before finishing high school and quickly had children.

To get this house, built by Habitat for Humanity and valued at \$48,000, the Chadwicks had to invest several hundred "sweat-equity hours" building other Habitat houses, go through a battery of long interviews and a credit check, and provide a \$600 down payment. "It's taken me eight years," Bruce said, "to get a job that is somewhat decent. I'm not stupid, but I'm not the smartest guy in the world, and this house is a big step up from where we lived before."

Bruce and Corinna spent six years in a mobile-home park near the Tucson airport before moving here. "What was the mobile-home park like?" I asked.

They smiled knowingly. Bruce said, "It was a real interesting experience, I can tell you. By the time we left, all of the people living there when we moved in had gone." Corinna added, "We saw the place gradually change, and always for the worse. The place was full of children without guidance."

Here are some of the stories Bruce and Corinna told me about the trailer park:

A child tried repeatedly to stab one of the Chadwicks' children with a screwdriver. Corinna phoned the police, who told her that they "could do nothing because the perpetrator was under age." Nevertheless, the police lectured the mother of the offending child. "It went in one ear and out the other," Bruce said.

Another child was left alone in the driver's seat of a truck with the engine on. The child shifted gears and rammed a trailer.

One night Corinna saw a group of men with automatic rifles outside a neighbor's trailer. One of them said, "Okay, guys, let's hit it." They then assaulted the trailer. The men were undercover Drug Enforcement Administration agents. At night Bruce and Corinna frequently saw helicopters shining spotlights on one or another of the trailers. "There was a lot of drug activity," Bruce explained.

A next-door neighbor, six months behind in the rent, rigged the wiring system to blow up his trailer. His attempt failed. After he was evicted, an electrician discovered the plot in the course of an inspection.

"The insides of many of these trailers were unspeakable," Bruce told me. "The park was full of people who were constantly drunk and dirty. There were single men with sons and girlfriends—few real families. There were single moms on welfare even though their men lived with them—a lot of wel-

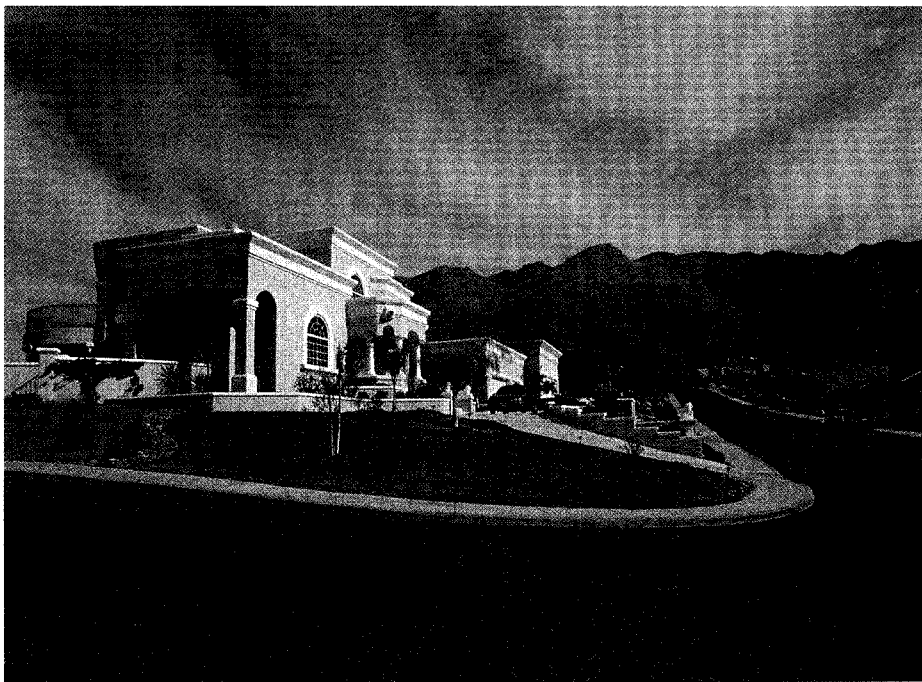
fare scams, yes. And there were always the loud arguments. I'll never forget the night that a man and a woman screamed at each other until dawn, when they started breaking windows. Once a neighbor became so drunk that he crawled up into a fetal position. The police took him away and he had to have his stomach pumped."

Bruce thought that the social dysfunction he had described could have been reduced by government aid. Corinna shook her head no and said, "A lot of people we've encountered can't be helped."

THE Catalina foothills, which look down upon the city from the north, are covered by winding streets with NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH signs; the comfortable villas that line them often have red-tiled roofs, electronic security systems, and extensive gardens of wiry mesquite, yucca trees, and cholla cacti, with their networks of dangerously spiny right-angled arms. Towering over this vegetation and providing many a villa with a distinctive character are saguaro cacti, some of them as tall as thirty feet and weighing up to ten tons, some of them older than the American republic.

Stuart Hameroff, a medical scientist at the University of Ari-

NORMA JEAN GARGASZ



New homes rise in the Catalina foothills

zona, lives in the Catalina foothills. He told me, "I never could have come as far as I have in my research had I lived on the East Coast, or even in a place like San Francisco. Those places are too cluttered, too vertical, with too many physical and cultural distractions. I need the desert and the absence of anything to look at in order to think clearly—and, more important, to think abstractly about the brain." In a nondescript little office on

the University of Arizona campus Hameroff maintains a Web site for scientists from several continents to exchange information about the biochemistry of consciousness. The office is as forgettable as the tract houses of the working poor. No imposing ivy-covered walls or neoclassical buildings are required for this ongoing, worldwide scientific work, nothing to suggest urbanity: just a computer and a telephone jack.

David K. Taylor, a planning-program coordinator for the

istically” provide for basic necessities, even as the numbers of the rich and the upper-middle class grew—a trend that has continued throughout the 1990s.

“In Tucson,” Taylor went on, “there are a large number of inexpensive tract houses thrown up hastily in the fifties, sixties, and early seventies which are now falling apart. Soon their repair costs will not make economic sense. Some of their owners will be able to afford more-expensive homes in neighborhoods

In a house in the foothills I sat beside Taylor's grand piano. "Where you are now could be Santa Fe, Palm Beach, or Long Island," he said. "My neighbors are Pakistani doctors, Silicon Valley types, ingenious local entrepreneurs, wealthy Lebanese, Chinese. These people are the only future Tucson has."

City of Tucson, also lives in the foothills. Taylor, a demographer, helped me to understand the past and future social geography of Tucson, and of the United States, too.

I sat beside Taylor's grand piano, under a high white ceiling. “Where you are now could be Santa Fe, Palm Beach, or Long Island,” he said. “My neighbors are Pakistani doctors, Silicon Valley types, ingenious local entrepreneurs, wealthy Lebanese, Chinese. They have their computers, their links with friends throughout the globe, and a patina of Spanish culture via the street names of this neighborhood and the villa architecture, and they call it a lifestyle. Of course, these people are the only future Tucson has. You lure—you bribe—high-tech firms to relocate here with those high-paying jobs in order to attract more people like my neighbors to Tucson, because experience indicates that most of the poor, even with training, will never be qualified for such jobs.” I had heard these exact sentiments in St. Louis and other cities.

Taylor continued, “The local government's promotion of tourism and the Tucson convention site will bring mainly low-paying service jobs to the area. Tourist promotion is usually necessary to generate corporate moves. So if we want those high-tech firms, we will have to emphasize tourism.”

Taylor showed me two graphs that suggest an increasingly bifurcated future for Pima County, where Tucson is situated. The 1979 graph showed a tidy bell curve (or, as Taylor put it, a “one-hump camel”), with the rich and the poor at the bottom edges and the middle class forming the rise in the middle. The 1989 graph showed a “two-hump camel,” with the rich and the poor forming humps at the edges, at the expense of middle-income groups. In that year, nationally, 22.8 percent of the population lived in households whose income could not “real-

with good schools, farther out in the desert, while many more will slip through the cracks, going broke on repairs or drifting to bad sections of town.” Throughout the country, Taylor said, the decay of cheap housing from the first decades after the Second World War is causing the same problem: further eroding the “middle-middle” class, even as the working poor and the upper-middle class become increasingly isolated from each other geographically. In Tucson the high cost of bringing water and other services to the edge of the desert abets this trend, since it is chiefly the well-off who can afford to live in the new outlying suburbs.

Taylor summed up Tucson's history: “Two hundred and fifty years ago the population here was a hundred percent Native American. Next it became ninety-five percent Spanish. When Santa Anna sold southern Arizona cheap to Jefferson Davis, you saw the first and only integration of cultures here, because the Anglo males who came west had to marry Mexican women, or at the very least partially assimilate with the reigning Mexican culture in order to do business. But the coming of the railroad and then the automobile redivided the city into a poor Spanish-speaking section, with some blacks, south of the railroad tracks, and a wealthier Anglo one to the north and east. Now class barriers are further deepening cultural and racial ones.” So instead of a unified, Spanish-built, Roman-style garrison, as it was in the eighteenth century, Tucson is becoming several garrisons, where each house is more isolated from the others than ever before. “Tucson has only twenty-five hundred persons per square mile,” Taylor said. “We're less dense than at any moment in the past two hundred years. And who knows what the limits of growth here are? Of course, we're not as bad as Phoenix, where the

motto seems to be *More development is better, and too much is just right.*"

"Meanwhile," Taylor said, "the Anglo population keeps dropping. Anglos are sixty-eight percent of the Tucson area's population; in 2050 we'll be forty percent, while the percentage of Hispanics will rise from twenty-four percent to forty percent. The future means integration with Sonora. Why, Sonora will just be southern Arizona, and Chihuahua south Texas! Guaymas might be Tucson's main port. Tucson's economy already extends a thousand miles into Mexico."

"Will the American Southwest merge completely with northern Mexico?" I asked.

"Not completely," Taylor said. "There will be a big Asian element here too. The Southwest will move toward both Latin America and the Pacific, in terms of trade and people. The young work force that will subsidize the Social Security payments for our aging Baby Boomers will have to come not just from south of the border but also from the densely populated, industrializing, low-crime societies of the Third World—places like East and Southeast Asia and the Indian subcontinent, where life is much worse than in America but talent and individual initiative are high. Racially, we'll look like a combination of Mexico and Hawaii. Tucson will reflect that trend."

AUBADE

Sinews here and there,
his legs twined at desk
and all of him bare,

mousing around, click,
so the child won't wake.
Sinews, his sex thick

but lapped, glasses
found then lost then
a child flushes

and my hands on him
count only as clothes,
as information.

Sinews, I say, *sotto voce*,
and he smiles into
his screen. At me?

—TERESE SVOBODA

Desert Politics

TUCSON is American history on fast-forward. A century ago there was little here but desert and a few dusty streets. Now there is a vast pod of suburbs differentiated by income, on the verge of becoming the hub of a transitional region extending deep into Mexico, at the same time that drugs from Mexico feed the lawlessness that plagues the South Side of the city. While Tucson becomes increasingly connected to the outside world through immigration and electronic communication, its people are increasingly isolated from one another, the houses farther and farther apart, the public spaces empty. To me, the city's terrain seemed to say, *Leave me alone.*

I wanted to sample true American loneliness—the extremes of individualism. So I left Tucson and headed back south.

After driving more than a mile on dirt tracks in the desert, I descended a steep and rutted hillside to reach Jeff Smith's house, where I was met by a growling dog. Smith came out in his wheelchair. "Don't worry about your car," he said. "I'll tow you with my pickup if you can't make it back up that hill."

I was now only twenty-eight miles from the border, far from the nearest paved road, between the towns of Sonoita and Patagonia. Smith's closest neighbor was almost a mile away, and Smith, who is paralyzed from the chest down because of a motorcycle accident, was feuding with him. Smith led me into his two-story adobe house, fitted with a specially designed elevator for his wheelchair, which he built with the help of a few Mexican illegals. He was around fifty, gray-haired, and wearing jeans. "A screaming liberal," his friend Emil Franzi, a political operative in Tucson, told me when we were discussing interesting Tucsonans.

"Unfortunately," Smith said, "while my fellow liberals on the East and West Coasts are very good on the First and Fourth Amendments—free speech and worship, and protection against 'unreasonable searches and seizures'—liberals look down on those rights and amendments that they don't use, like the Second Amendment, the right to bear arms." He put deliberate stress on the numbers, "First," "Fourth," and "Second"; the Constitution and the Bill of Rights were clearly living, sacred documents to him, as the Old Testament is to Orthodox Jews and evangelical Christians. Rather than a liberal, Smith, who owns thirty guns, was, like many others I met in the Southwest, a spirited libertarian who feels that the government has no right to ban abortions, semi-automatic assault rifles, or perhaps even marijuana.

I asked him, "Do we really need semi-automatics?"

Smith said, "Chechnya proves that you need semis to prevent tyranny, because with an armed populace a tyrannical central government will be forced to fight door to door."

"But the United States government is not like the Russian one."

"One day it could become just as tyrannical. It would happen gradually, by stealth. Don't say it can't happen! Would you rather be free or merely safe? That's the question Americans have to answer. Bill Clinton and Janet Reno need to understand the natural state of human freedom."

"But you will always need a strong federal government," I said. "Just look at the land dispute between the Hopis and the Navajos in northern Arizona. It is the federal government

"large, bloody cataclysms" that could "bring down the Electoral College"; about how "the South Side of Tucson might make war on the Catalina foothills, an idea that might originate from some TV show." Smith, like many Democratic environmentalists but unlike Republican business types, is against growth. "I almost hope for an environmental catastrophe, so people will start leaving Tucson and stop building more homes. If it takes thirty years for the area to recover, what's the harm in the long run?"

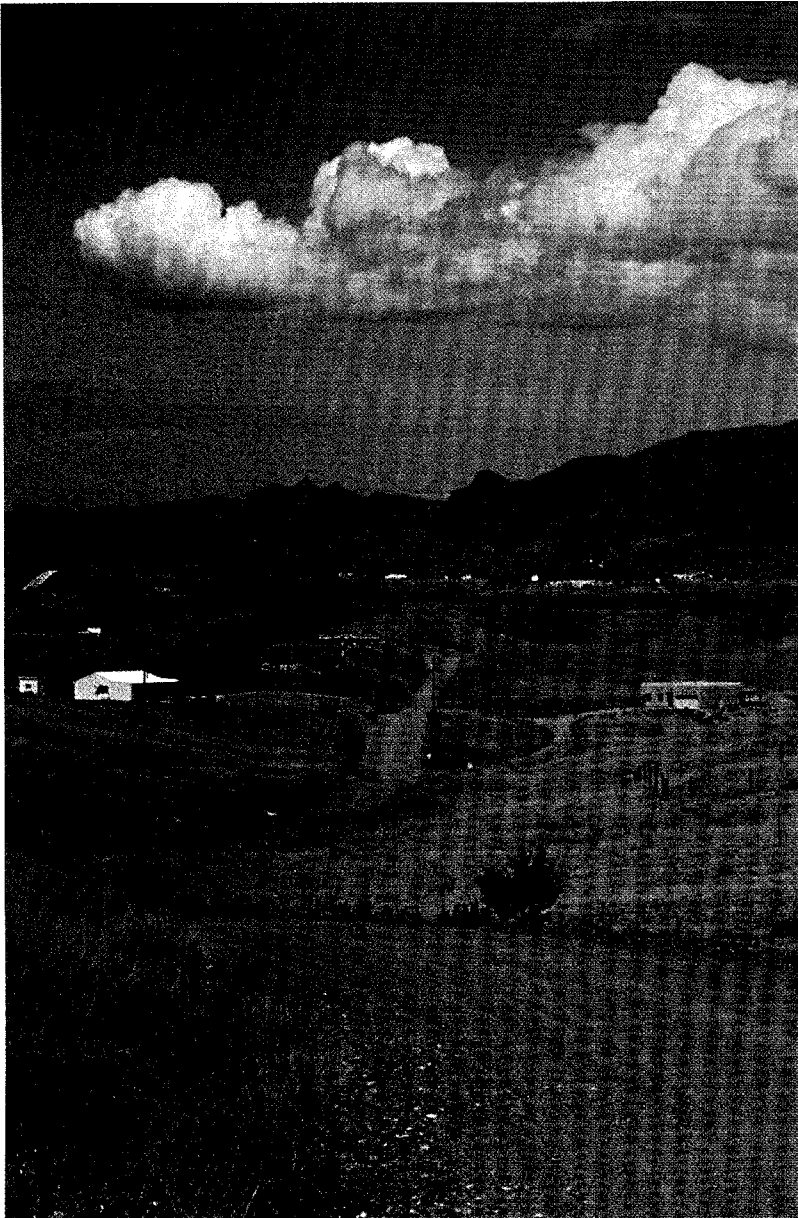
Smith and I were sitting in the mathematical purity of his white-walled adobe house. Through his living-room window I could see a hillside of tall, coarse gramma grass and mesquite trees. Smith lives alone amid this meditative, prismlike beauty. His house is in a valley where radio transmissions are problematic. Like many people in rural America who live far from a big town, he has his own well. He goes only twice a week to his mailbox, more than a mile away on the nearest paved road. It occurred to me that Smith's political absolutes and abstractions regarding issues like semi-automatic rifles and the power of the federal government arise to no small extent out of sheer physical isolation. The continent's very emptiness, along with its overpowering natural forces—floods, twisters, hurricanes—for which Europe offers no equivalent, confers a pioneer spirit that loses relevance in an age of advanced technology. The last frontiersmen like Smith are, perforce, somewhat absurd.

I remembered what John E. Pintek, the sheriff of Cochise County, on Arizona's border with Mexico, had told me about militiamen: "These are people who can barely speak without profanities—like 'Why the fuck should I vote?' . . . Besides being uneducated, they often have records of petty crime which prevent them from getting decent jobs. If they are not on welfare or unemployment insurance, they work as night clerks at convenience stores and, as they will tell you, 'defend the U.S.A. on weekends.' With social change so dramatic, there are just more and more losers out there."

Jeff Smith is no militiaman. He is far too well educated and cosmopolitan for that. He makes a living as a writer for a weekly alternative newspaper. But just imagine the state of mind of an unedu-

cated, or badly educated, white male who is full of resentment and without social graces—"a fat lard-ass with pimples," as Pintek had put it to me—living in Smith's kind of isolation.

Smith's friend Franzi had told me in Tucson, "Look, I'm a First Amendment guy *and* a gun nut. I'm a member of the NRA, I go to gun shows on weekends, and I don't know any of these militia people! Where are they? These guys must live in the middle of nowhere. They don't vote, they're completely beyond the 'process.' They think the NRA is too left-wing.



NORMA JEAN GARGASZ

South of Tucson, on the edge of loneliness

that to this day keeps the peace between many Indian tribes."

"If the federal government collapsed," Smith responded, "the Navajos might just kill the Hopis. Then, after an unstable period, the Navajos would assimilate into the general society. The world wouldn't come to an end. We think we need a federal government, but do we really?"

The morning wore on. Smith made coffee, and talked about

... In the days of the military draft, when there was no mystique attached to carrying a gun and wearing a uniform, these guys didn't exist."

EMIL Franzi runs election campaigns, mainly for Republicans, at the state-legislature and county-sheriff level. He is a small-time Ed Rollins, who also happens to own sixty guns

the largest city in the United States that is dependent entirely on groundwater, so its underground aquifers are being steadily depleted. The most contentious issue on the Tucson ballot that November had to do with water. The dispute centered on Colorado River water transported to the city in a zigzagging, man-made river, uphill from the California border and across the bleakest patch of the Sonoran Desert, at a cost of billions of dollars, in a scheme called the Central Arizona Project

The United States is, for the most part, politically apathetic. But this relative political vacuum always presumed abundant prosperity and resources. Once land and water were parceled out, people were free to do what they wanted. Now the day of reckoning is coming for humankind and nature in the West.

and 3,000 opera records. Franzi supports both the National Rifle Association and National Public Radio. He and Jeff Smith might well share a motto: *The less the government is able to accomplish the better. Thank God for gridlock; James Madison spent his life inventing it.*

I first met Franzi in the cramped cubicle of a Tucson AM station on election night, November 7, 1995. The station had the low-rent, fly-by-night quality of local radio stations throughout America: the furniture and equipment looked as though they had been dumped there by a moving company the day before and might be repossessed the next morning if the ratings dropped. Franzi's voice was loud, conspiratorial, friendly, as if we had known each other all our lives. Formalities aren't necessary in the Southwest. Because so many people who settle here come without friends or family, and housing is so widely separated, when people do meet they connect quickly.

"Have you noticed something about this place—about Tucson and Arizona, I mean? Have you looked around?" Franzi shouted a few inches from my face. Then his voice descended into a low, exasperated hiss: "It's a fucking desert—over seven hundred thousand people surrounded by a desert! And they still want to build, build. Where's the water going to come from? You tell me."

Franzi was not exaggerating. Any place with less than twenty inches of rainfall a year—a category that includes almost all of the American West—will sustain a human population only with difficulty, and places like Tucson, with an average annual rainfall of eleven inches, and Phoenix and El Paso, which average about eight inches of rain a year, are perhaps not places to inhabit at all, as Marc Reisner, an expert on water resources in the West, writes in *Cadillac Desert*. Tucson is

(CAP). But after all this expense CAP water turned out to be problematic. It was hard and caused corrosion in pipes to loosen, with the result that the water looked brownish and people thought it made them ill. Many people wanted to ban CAP water from Tucson and continue to use only the water from underground aquifers. Proponents argued, however, that CAP water was more affordable, that its quality could be improved by treatment with chemicals, and that it would ensure Tucson enough water for the next century.

"Who's really supporting CAP water and who is against it?" I asked Franzi.

"Basically, a vote in favor of CAP water is a vote that says, Don't fuck with development, since if we're forced to depend on aquifer water, there's just not going to be enough water for Tucson to keep expanding. Me, I'm a no-growther. I don't want the dirt road leading to my house ever to be paved. I don't want one more building to be built in Tucson. We're already too big. We're in a desert!"

The no-growthers won that night. CAP water lost. But that did not satisfy Franzi. On the air live in the studio, he told the talk-show host John C. Scott that "Tucson voters are the stupidest voters in the country," because they had defeated CAP water but re-elected the same Democratic Party politicians who had promoted it. Scott agreed. Earlier that day Scott had told his audience that he himself had voted "down the line" Republican. These Tucson radio commentators were criticizing both the voters and the politicians that election night. The voters phoned in and had their say too. Sitting inside the dark ten-foot-by-ten-foot recording room, lined with foam and stacked to the ceiling with equipment, listening to callers scream at Scott and Franzi and hearing Scott and Franzi answer back, I knew that such places

had become the high altars of American democracy. This was local politics, and the issue at hand was water: life and death.

Yet only one out of four eligible voters had voted—about the same turnout as in the Haitian election held the following month. The voices crackling over the speakers represented only a minute subculture obsessed with politics. Less than five percent of adult Americans engage in any kind of political activity, aside from voting.

OTHER than the policy and media types in Washington, the state capitals, and town halls, the United States is politically apathetic. After spending much of my life observing traditional and highly politicized cultures in the Third World and

ondary importance. Despite what some believe, ethnic identity has yet to destabilize American politics, because ethnicity is largely divorced from territory (except in the case of Native Americans), as it is not in the former Yugoslavia and the former Soviet Union. And because what is argued about is likelier to be secondary than something to fight or die for, democracy has evolved as the lowest common denominator of practical wisdom for a nation of individuals, most of whom prefer to be left alone to make money.

Not only has politics been secondary for most Americans but so, typically, has leadership. From the early nineteenth century onward the nation prospered despite long sequences of mediocre Presidents. Periods of great growth—the second half of the nineteenth century, for example—were accompa-



JIM RICHARDSON

the Balkans, which have been sundered by ideological and ethnic obsessions (and boasting, by the way, high voter turnouts), I found such apathy refreshing when I returned to the United States—at first. Apathy, after all, can mean that things are fine. In America it is testimony to the fact that the basic questions—What should the system of government be? Where should the borders be? Which ethnic groups, if any, should control what regions?—have been more or less resolved. What is often argued about—gun control, abortion—is thus of sec-

Central Arizona Project aqueduct, 336 miles long

nied by mediocre Administrations. Only in wartime did it truly matter who the President was. (Indeed, in peacetime the chairman of the Federal Reserve may affect the lives of many more citizens than the President does.)

But this relative political vacuum—a sort of peaceful and productive anarchy—always presumed, among other things, abundant prosperity and resources, so that little governing au-

thority was necessary to organize the scramble for wealth. The large-scale settlement of the West following the Civil War cramped this freedom a bit. Nature itself ordained government help and supervision, because the lands west of the 100th meridian (which runs through the Dakotas, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas) receive, for the most part, less than twenty inches of rain annually—the minimum required not only to sustain a human population but also for agriculture without irrigation. Land had to be surveyed, parceled out, and regulated, and great water projects begun, which required vast bureaucratic institutions (the Reclamation Service, the Geological Survey, the Forest Service, and so forth). These, together with great growth in both the population and the economy in the latter part of the nineteenth century, contributed to the big federal government that people like Smith and Franzi now fear. Indeed, had the United States been settled from west to east rather than the other way around, the big government agencies necessitated by scarce water would have preceded the freeman tradition that took root on the well-watered eastern slopes of the Appalachians in the eighteenth century, and a mild form of hydraulic civilization—highly centralized and authoritarian regimes, like those that built the great water and earth works in India, China, and Mexico—might have arisen here.

But the claims of the militia movement and other libertarians notwithstanding, government intrusion has remained limited. Once land and water were parceled out, people were free to do what they wanted, to succeed beyond their wildest hopes or fail beyond their worst nightmares. And the discovery, mapping, and exploitation of aquifers in the first half of the twentieth century has further postponed the day of reckoning for humankind and nature in the West. But that day is coming. In 1928 Arizona's population reached 400,000, the largest it had been since the apex of the Hohokam Indian culture of the thirteenth century. Now more than 800,000 people live in greater Tucson alone, and four million in Arizona, a tenfold increase in seventy years—in a desert, no less. Referring to the Central Arizona Project, Marc Reisner writes, "Despite one of the most spellbinding and expensive waterworks of all time, Arizonans from now until eternity will be forced to do what their Hohokam ancestors did: pray for rain." Especially as Arizonans have decided—at least in Tucson—that CAP water is not good enough for them, and thus their only choice is to continue to deplete the aquifers.

What the voter turnout actually suggested is that the vast majority of Tucson-area residents were unconcerned about this and other communal issues. As the hollowing-out of downtown also shows, the social and communal fabric appears to be fraying at the very moment in southwestern history when it is needed in the oncoming battle for water. The transnational, mestizo-Polynesian Tucson of the future—one of twenty-first-century North America's economic junctions for the world's most talented individuals—will require the opposite

of individualism. It will need communalism merely to survive.

Gary Snyder, an ecologist and a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, warns, "This is an age of limits." But Roy Drachman, the Tucson real-estate developer, who helped to build the Sunbelt, thinks that people here will pay little attention to such warnings. Sitting in his low-ceilinged office next to a parking lot and a restaurant, Drachman told me, "There are no limits. We will eat up more and more space out into the desert, and there will be more and more loneliness, and consequently more and more need for friendships. At first there won't be a water shortage, though. The price of water will just go up and the quality will go down. Then we'll see."

Maybe Drachman is right. Maybe the Southwest can buy itself more time. Maybe, as some visionary engineers think, the Southwest's salvation will come ultimately from that shivery vastness of wet, green sponge to the north: Canada. In this scenario a network of new dams, reservoirs, and tunnels would supply water from the Yukon and British Columbia to the Mexican border, while a giant canal would bring desalinized Hudson Bay water from Quebec to the American Midwest, and supertankers would carry glacial water from the British Columbian coast to southern California—all to support an enlarged network of post-urban, multi-ethnic pods pulsing with economic activity.

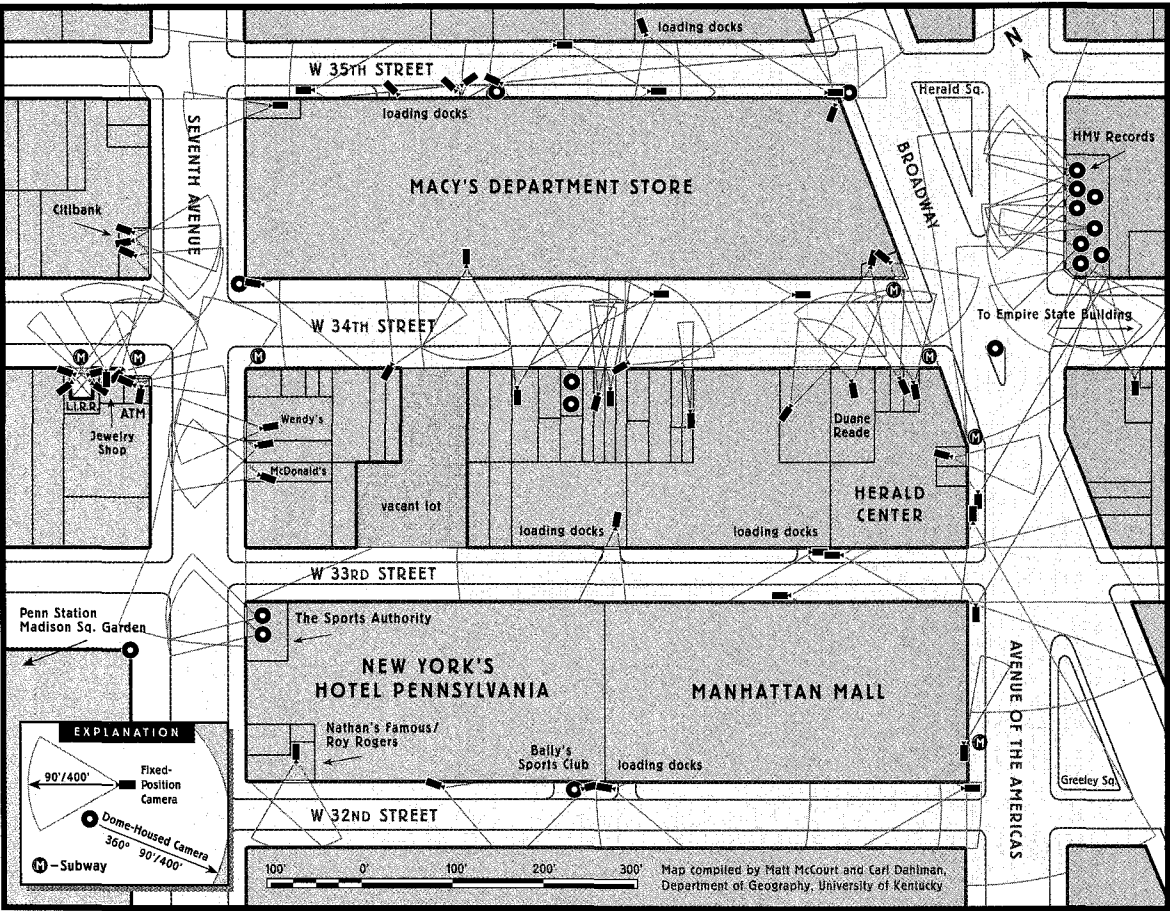
Places like Phoenix and Tucson straddle the divide between bold, futuristic dreams and apocalypse. The coupling I encountered of adrenaline-charged friendliness with extreme apathy and antigovernment views suggested a no less intense loneliness, emphasizing the need for community while at the same time threatening it.

There is also the threat posed by 92 million Mexicans whose border is an hour's drive south of Tucson. During the Mexican Revolution and its attendant civil wars, from 1910 to 1922, more than 10 percent of Mexico's population of 13 million fled to the United States. Now, as Mexico's population climbs past 100 million, imagine the level of militarization and domination from Washington that would be required to control a comparable flood of refugees, were Mexico's central government to devolve into a weak tributary-state system.

In Tucson I wondered if America might need a new, more candid myth than that of the rugged individualism that settled the West. In truth, this region could never have been tamed successfully without big-government intervention and the creation of bureaucracies—just what rugged individualists like Jeff Smith hate. As for America's future, if there is to be justice for anyone, the gradual, ongoing increase in both the size and the complexity of our population (which in the next fifty years is likely to grow by half, to 390 million) will eventually require regulatory tyranny—the governing of everything from water use to credit-card fraud. But what will individualists do then? ☿

Next month: Los Angeles, Orange County, Portland, and Vancouver, British Columbia.

To See and Be Seen



RECENTLY Vice President Al Gore proposed sending a satellite equipped with a high-definition video camera a million miles into space to broadcast live images of our planet to computer and television screens around the clock. Whether such a use of video technology would be educational or merely otherworldly, the idea is right in tune with the proliferation of cameras trained on our daily lives, from whatever height. At street level, for private-security or public-safety reasons (or for no apparent reason, as seems to be the case with a myriad of “Web cams” worldwide), closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras are watching over more and more public space.

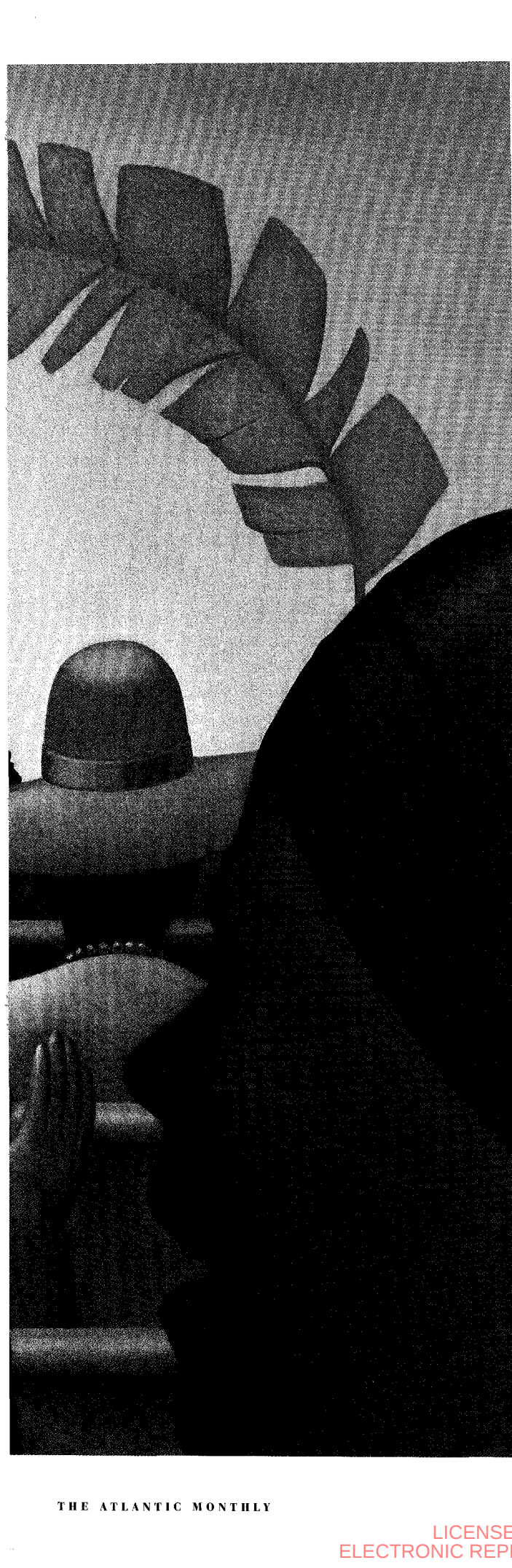
The map above, derived from a recent walking inventory of all easily spotted CCTV cameras in a three-block area of midtown Manhattan, shows a strikingly dense network of cameras, in which coverage of street-level activities is near-total. Although the map can make no claim to represent precisely the viewing capabilities of any one of the more than six dozen cameras shown, it does suggest how much of everyday urban life can fall under the gaze of electronic eyes. The fields of view of interior- and exterior-mounted cameras were assumed to extend

ninety and 400 feet, respectively. A camera may zoom, pan, or tilt, or it may sit motionless on its perch, but it will never blink.

The United Kingdom is the unofficial world leader in the use of video technology for public-safety purposes, with substantial government funding for police-monitored cameras. The United States may not be far behind. According to an upcoming—and admittedly small—survey by the Security Industry Association, police and municipal organizations in some sixty American cities are using or implementing video technology to monitor public areas in the name of public safety. In New York City the police department is in the process of expanding a program of installing surveillance cameras around housing projects and in parks and subway stations, adding to the countless privately operated cameras already, inevitably, pointing into public spaces. Crime rates may fall; Orwellian fears may rise. What is certain is that “to see and be seen,” in cities large and small, is fast taking on a new meaning. —Allan Reeder

Research for this map, which is the sole responsibility of its authors, was supported by the National Center for Geographic Information and Analysis (under a grant from the National Science Foundation) and John Pickles, Department of Geography, University of Kentucky.





HYMN

by EMILY HIESTAND

*Nearly a century has
passed since W.E.B. Du Bois
identified “the problem of the twentieth
century,” but as the millennium
arrives, the legacy of the color line is
palpable in American life. One of the
times that line is still deeply
inscribed and observed is
Sunday morning*

THE school for the spirit is everywhere and unofficial, but when I was a child, in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, in the early 1950s, an awful lot of the formal spiritual education I received took place in a room in a cinder-block building called the Annex—a consecration of folding chairs, library paste, and construction paper in assorted colors. In that school we learned the Ten Commandments, and how to be a shepherd in the Christmas pageant. We learned a phrase I have not forgotten—“the still, small voice”—and we learned hymns. Each week one or two children were asked to select the hymns for the children’s service.

One week a timid towheaded boy sat by my side as we leafed through wafer-thin pages, and I chose “Wasn’t That a Mighty Day,” “Wade in the Water,” and “Go Down, Moses.” The hymn numbers were chalked on the board (we gave just the numbers, not the titles, to a teacher), there was a reading, and then we recited the prayer we were learning, being careful and proud to say, “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors,” in the Presbyterian way, rather than “trespasses” and “those who trespass against us,” as my Southern Baptist relatives did. The problems posed in a child’s mind by the two phrasings, both individually and in comparison (bank-

ers? property lines?), are a detour of too great a magnitude to entertain here. When the time came to sing, we opened our hymnals to the numbers on the board. We sang the first song and were turning to the second when one of the teachers suddenly halted the proceedings, searched our faces, and asked, "Who chose these hymns?"

The tone of the question was not admiring and not entirely accusatory either. It was not at all easy to interpret. The timid boy and I must have looked the most miserable of the miserable, for the teacher's eyes came to rest on us. I had not abandoned a slight hope that we were being singled out for praise, but after I had been identified as the active agent, I merely received a long, hard look. Those were the days when a look was still a full player in the house of manners. The teacher then selected other hymns (dull ones), and the morning went on in an ordinary way until we were released to run to our parents, in the fellowship hall of the church proper, where we squirmed until they finally stopped socializing and I could race to the family car, be driven home, take off my fancy clothes, and at last, over my mother's chicken and dumplings, and then the *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, return to the regular world. But I was changed.

For the rest of that day I hoped by mimicking normalcy to paper over the gulf that had opened between myself and society. I had chosen bad hymns. Or not bad, exactly, because what would they be doing in the hymnal in the first place if they weren't good? Adults often gave a reason, however tenuous, for their rules: "Look both ways, because a car might be coming." "Eat your flan, because your mother made it specially." But no explanation was offered for why we should not want to sing what were then called Negro spirituals. I grasped that the matter, whatever it was, was not theological but rather a social nuance, and I suspected that it had to do with the spine-tingling quality of my chosen hymns—songs that were stately and high-toned with longing and sorrow, and also, curiously, with far more happiness than could be found in the regular grizzled psalmodies.

There was a good deal about the situation that a seven-year-old could not grasp. Most citizens of our town had come from other regions of the country—and even from other countries—to distill uranium and do atomic research. Oak Ridge was Atom City, hardly a typical southern town, and yet when Christine Barnes and I went to McCrory's five-and-dime, we passed two water fountains, one of them la-

beled with a hand-lettered cardboard sign. We had seen the Jim Crow sign for as long as we had been coming to the dime store, and we found it not exactly repulsive—we didn't have the consciousness for that—but in some way shabby. We didn't like it and we defied it. Many times Christine and I went to the "colored" water fountain and drank from it. Our act was a combination of scientific interest—calmly testing to see what would happen to us or to the five-and-dime if this curious division was breached—and a child's inborn antenna for the weak places in adult logic.

Tennessee in the early fifties was a segregated state, although the mountainous, hardscrabble communities of Appalachia had never been conducive to the plantation and sharecropping systems, and many of the black citizens of Oak Ridge had migrated from the Deep South to labor in the secret bomb factories. Blacks in Oak Ridge during the war years dis-

covered one of the most intentionally segregated communities in the country; Manhattan Project officials had set up the town's housing and even commercial districts to conform with prevailing racial customs of the region. By the late 1940s scientists and religious leaders had begun to object. Oak Ridge was to send white pastors to Selma with books for black churches, and to desegregate its pools, movie houses, and restaurants more willingly, perhaps, than any other southern town. A group

of white men in Oak Ridge guaranteed all their business to the first white barber to integrate his shop. Black and white women created a day-care center and swim programs. But progressive Oak Ridge was layered over existing racist structures, and during the 1950s African-American citizens lived and went to elementary school in a segregated part of town.

IT was in this unusual town, in a border state, in my parents' music cabinet, that I first discovered black gospel: a handful of recordings tucked among Charlie Parker's "Bird of Paradise," the operas *Turandot* and *Der Rosenkavalier*, and, surprisingly, a single of Rudy Vallee singing "As Time Goes By." My younger brothers and I had a small portable record player for listening to translucent orange records of "The Little Engine That Could" and the terrifying "Tale of the Grasshopper and the Ants." But after we had been trained to place the needle on the empty band at the beginning of a record, we were allowed to use the adult phonograph—quietly. Sitting on the floor with my back against the cabinet, I listened over and over to several thick 78s, mostly of Mahalia



LIKE other black churches in America, Union Baptist is an oasis and a center of community life, a nurturing place. The church describes itself as having the "widest doors in the city."

Jackson (accompanied by Mildred Falls) rendering the slow poetry of “Take My Hand, Precious Lord,” and the flattened sevenths of “If You See My Savior.” These were the compositions of Thomas A. Dorsey—not Tommy Dorsey but the synthesizing genius first known as Georgia Tom, who superimposed blues tropes over religious hymns, migrated north to the steel mills, and began to create gospel blues at the Pilgrim Baptist Church of Chicago. Once I was a little older, I listened to the Golden Gate Jubilee Quartet, to the 1929 recording of Blind Willie Johnson singing his eerie, strangled “Let Your Light Shine on Me,” and to the mighty sound that came from Ira Tucker and the Dixie Hummingbirds.

I was listening, unawares, to recordings made in the wake of the success of the Mills Brothers—gospel songs arranged in jazz, boogie, and blues styles that appealed to white as well as urban black audiences. Many years would pass before I found the independent-label recordings of a more rural gospel tradition, of early-Depression-era choirs, and of quartets from the black colleges singing “Get Right, Stay Right” and “I’m in a Strange Land.”

Meanwhile, the few records I did know spun on the felt cushion of the record player in our living room, issuing the haunting, bent notes of the southern New World. As Mahalia went “sightseeing in Beulah,” I sang with her, forgetting that my grandfather, a fine baritone, had declared, “Child, you cannot carry a tune in a *basket*.” No matter: Mahalia and I had feasted with the Rose of Sharon, had been on speaking terms with the spirit. It was not only the words—each one a physical fact, each one opened up, entered into, and walked around in—but the majestic juice of the sound: the sweeping river of the woman’s voice, bigger than any woman in our science town had ever allowed herself to sound, and the low, sweet solidity of the male voices. There was a moan at the center, but even so, long after the record went back into its cardboard sleeve there was gladness and buoyancy. It was a serious sound, and it also jumped. This was more than song, this was philosophy, for which children are always on the alert—as they are for any evidence that adults are pleased to be alive.

TO try to explain fully why one loves what one does seems not only fruitless but a little wrongheaded, on the order of dissection and with similar consequences. “Who chose these hymns?” The answer, needless to say, was that the music had chosen me, and mercifully I was yet too innocent to wonder whether I had any right to what was on that handful of 78s in my parents’ music cabinet. By the time I had grasped the irony of my rhapsodizing to black gospel, and soon to the Delta blues of Son House and Robert Johnson, to the *cri de coeur* of Bessie Smith; by the time I understood that the absence of some dignities that I took for granted was one provocation for African-American lyrics—by that time buses full of Freedom Riders were rolling south toward Anniston and Birmingham.

But that was still a little in the future. I was perhaps eight the summer in the early fifties when I sat one Sunday afternoon with relatives on a front porch in Alabama and saw a long line of black folks coming down the dusty red shoulder of the road beating tambourines, shouting and singing in a celebration unlike any I had ever witnessed in Atom City. “They’ve let out at Hurricane Baptist,” my aunt Clara said. “Looks like somebody got saved this morning.” I was ready to go to the road—to follow along or to be closer, I didn’t know—but my aunts said, Oh, no, that would be tacky, impolite, and not done. (Tackiness was, I knew, in a way worse than wickedness, which is rooted in original sin and subject to forgiveness, because tackiness is something you ought to be able to avoid altogether.) “You stay right here on the porch,” they said.

Most, but not all, of my Alabama relatives spoke respectfully of their black neighbors, with whom they shared a God, speech patterns, cuisine, Hurricane Creek, and the heat and wilting humidity. At that time my grandparents and great-aunts and -uncles were firmly embedded in the culture of segregation, but personally, in that curious, oft-remarked doubleness of the South, they were neighborly. They and their African-American neighbors had lived on adjacent lands for a long time, and their connection was real: collard greens, peanuts, tools, and sickbed courtesies were exchanged. A great-uncle did legal work gratis for his black neighbors, mostly routine matters; but once, his intervention with the court spared a man named Oscar Prince from an undeserved and hideous fate. Over the course of their lives many of my relatives traced the logic of their faith through to its radically beautiful conclusions. And yet we understood in the early fifties, sitting on a porch, going to a five-and-dime, singing in a Sunday school, that there existed some line, ill-defined but strong, that was not to be crossed.

Most of a century has passed since W.E.B. Du Bois named that line and called it the problem of the twentieth century, but as the millennium arrives, the legacy of the color line is palpable in American life. One of the times that line is still deeply inscribed and observed is Sunday morning. That hour on a porch in Alabama was decades in the past when, nearing fifty and having lived in New England for twenty years, I woke up one cold winter morning ready to heed an old intuition.

THE Union Baptist Church, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, sits between a U-Haul warehouse and a Shell service station. On Sundays its members may park in the lot of a defunct nightclub across the street. The church building is a handsome late-nineteenth-century structure, shingle-clad, with a tower that was once struck by lightning. The entrance doors are made of a honey-colored wood with a bas-relief cross on each panel. Inside, the congregation is busy this morning getting children into their small red robes and

getting the four choirs of the Combined Choirs combined.

"Merry Christmas and welcome to Union!" calls a woman bustling across the foyer.

The sanctuary is up two flights of stairs, a great room with rows of turned maple columns that support a wide mezzanine and an organ loft. A rain forest of poinsettias stands on the altar, and high in the chancel wall a diamond-shaped stained-glass window refracts the low winter sun into a beam of light. Over the length of the service (services at Union seem to fly but run to two and a half hours easily) the beam will slowly scan the room, surrounding one person after another in a violet nimbus.

The house is filled this morning: perhaps 400 people are in the pews. I notice, of course, that 399 of us are chestnut- or chocolate-brown, or the color of café au lait or toffee, or blue-black, or ocher-brown—the great spectrum of hue we improbably collapse into the single word "black"—and I am the shade that the Japanese call pink, that graphic designers specify as PMS 475, a light beige improbably called "white." But I knew this would be so. And I confess that I, a lover of hats, am also noticing the hat line. I am one of the few women present not wearing a great hat. Except for weddings, funerals, and brief prayers in tiny, candle-lit chapels on Greek islands, this is my first morning inside a church in three decades. Hat envy is not the first feeling the prodigal wants to have upon her return, but there it is. I could be wearing a great hat too, I think—and without one I feel incompletely dressed. A woman nearby wears a ruddy turban with a single saffron plume that moves gently in the air. A few rows ahead another woman is wearing a deep-red hat with a wide brim. It looks sedate—until the wearer rises, revealing a small comet of solid rhinestone on the underbrim. An elderly woman wears a beret at the perfect Parisian angle. Here are African wraps; a Moroccan pillbox; hats with veils, netting, and beads; and a high-modernist hat that looks like the upswept roof of the terminal at Dulles Airport.

A NUMBER of years have passed since that December celebration, and I have had cause to think in that great room about more than hats. Everyone knows that the black church in America is a rock and a beacon, and others are far more steeped in its ways and history, more qualified to speak of its nature, than a white woman whose beliefs do not rest within any one system. But surely people of any faith or ancestry may feel the moral fire that has moved in this church and others like it. And anyone may register the gravitas of its rooms. Anyone may notice that this church is a place of routine loveliness, an American place whose respect for elders, whose gloved ushers and afternoon collations, whose tradition of formal address and courtesy titles (Reverend, Deacon, Doctor, Brother, and Sister), are all elements in a honed artistry—in the sheer comeliness of the community—that is itself a form of sanctuary.

THE oldest women, the matriarchs of the church, are the first to extend a welcome, the first to ask my name, where I live, whether I am married. These women pat my hand, saying things like "Bless you, child, come back and see us." I'm more pleased than I can say, not only to be so graciously received, but also to observe a group of elderly women wielding their power to size someone up. During the first months I attend this church, my pew neighbor is most often Doris Callender. ("Miss," she corrects me when I say "Mrs. Callender"—"I'm Miss.") Miss Doris Callender is a small woman who often wears a blue felt hat and always sits near a stained-glass window where, without eyeglasses, she follows Scripture in a tiny Bible printed in tiny type—a text that is to my younger eyes only a blur.

Many mornings the message comes to me not only from the pulpit but also from Miss Callender, who has just turned eighty. I know because a notice of her birthday offering of eighty dollars was printed in the bulletin. "One for every year the Lord has given me," she told me. She is reserved but kindly, and one morning discreetly slips me a tissue when she sees me dabbing my eyes. When I thank her, she whispers, "That's what we're here for, to help each other," proposing an answer to life's most pressing question in nine soft words.

I sit next to Miss Callender and another elderly woman—a widow I'll call Gladys Reed—through April and May, and in June of that year a heat wave settles over New England. One sweltering Sunday the sanctuary is af flutter with paper fans donated by a local funeral home—exactly the kind of fans that my great-aunts kept on their front porches and in their parlors, printed in over-the-top Maxfield Parrish colors and stapled to flat wooden sticks that resemble giant tongue depressors. The sermon is under way, and the room is growing warmer. As a young, white-gloved woman—officially, an "usherette"—passes our pew, Gladys Reed pantomimes that she requires a fan. The usherette whispers apologetically that the fans have run out, whereupon Mrs. Reed fixes her with a look. It is swift and momentary, and in another room it might not even be noticed. But here, where elders are treasured, are attended, the younger woman fully absorbs its meaning: an elder wants a fan right this minute. Scurrying, the usherette returns with an extra program that Mrs. Reed might use in lieu of a fan. My seatmate barely glances at it, dismissing the patently absurd idea of using a program as a fan. Next the top part of a fan is brought—an old and battered cardboard lacking its wooden handle. Mrs. Reed sniffs, moving her hand in a minimalist gesture. Stricken, the usherette disappears. Ten, fifteen minutes pass, and the room grows warmer. And then the young woman reappears—out of breath, clearly having left the church, driven many blocks to the funeral home, picked up new fans, driven back, raced inside and upstairs to the sanctuary, and hurried down the aisle to present Mrs. Reed with the first from a stack of new, whole fans. Mrs. Reed accepts the fan with the faintest of nods.

THIS community of old-fashioned civilities is pastored by the Reverend Jeffrey L. Brown, a lean, brilliant man with a droll sense of humor and what one of his co-pastors calls an “on-fire heart.” Not yet forty, Brown was one of the founders of the Boston Ten Point Coalition, a group of progressive urban ministers whose effect among our city’s most disenfranchised young people has been so profound that the coalition’s model is being translated to Tampa; Louisville; Philadelphia; Gary, Indiana; and other urban centers. The Ten Point Coalition has caught the eye of government policymakers, who are looking at the possibility that faith-based institutions, specifically black churches, may have the know-how to renew the inner cities. And it has caught the eye of leaders in South Africa, Sri Lanka, and Rio de Janeiro, other places where children suffer from nihilism rooted in injustice, violence, and poverty. Reverend Brown studied at Harvard, but he learned to preach—we can be thankful—elsewhere, beginning at the foot of some master in a hamlet of North Carolina. Brown is at ease penning op-ed pieces for *The Boston Globe*, leading a prayer protest in the Rotunda of the U.S. Capitol, delivering a scholarly paper, negotiating a midnight peace with gang members, or visiting a Unitarian pulpit across town. In his own pulpit he can, as he puts it, “cut loose.”

In America more black women than white are in the pulpit, although until recently most of them ministered to small congregations in storefront and home-based churches. Following traditions brought to America by Africans, women in mainstream black churches have considerable authority as worship leaders, prayer warriors, and teachers. Officially, however, the major black Christian denominations have been as slow as their white counterparts to ordain women. Significantly, Jeffrey Brown shares the pulpit at Union Baptist with two distinguished women: the Reverend Dr. Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, a scholar of African-American studies and the sociology of religion; and the Reverend Zina Jacque-Bell, a devoted teacher of biblical texts and a luminous innovator. About this trio I feel what everyone else in the congregation must—lucky in the way we feel when, say, a couple of planets and a full moon make a rare conjunction in the evening sky. Each week the pulpit at Union is alive with story and exegesis of text, with cultural diagnosis and calls to action, with counsel for souls and flashing wit—all interwoven in the best tradition of black sacred oratory. “God’s trombones,” the author James Weldon Johnson called the men and women who inhabit the black

pulpit. Lucid and subtle on the significance of Job’s suffering, bracing on the nature of courage, passionate on the supreme importance of nurturing children, Jeffrey Brown usually manages to work into his remarks how fine someone looks—or how fine *everyone* looks—and the fact that Bible study is at six-thirty on Wednesday night.

This sanctuary is also a home to the sounds that have spoken to me from the beginning, that inexplicable alchemy of longing and joy. Here a middle-aged woman in sunglasses sings a bluesy version of “Can’t Nobody Do Me Like Jesus” that could qualify as one of the proofs. Here the congregation stands each week to sing choruses of “Glad to be in the service, glad to be in the service, glad to be in the service one more time”—several hundred people on their feet giving every human indication of gladness. “*God is good*,” an elderly man declares. “*ALL the time!*” responds a chorus. Here,

as a pastor makes an especially nice point, a young man shouts, “*Tell the world!*” A woman in a trim business suit stands. “*Teach!*” she calls, in a penetrating voice that zings through the air and lands on the pulpit like a flower thrown to an opera star. The woman raises one arm and waves it slowly back and forth above her head. More women stand, and the air is full of graceful waving arms. Four men begin an antiphonal exchange with the preacher, elongating “well” into a two-syllable word that

rises at the end like an encouraging question.

“There is one more thing . . .,” Reverend Brown says.

“Weh—ell?” the men say.

“The Christmas message came from someone in *particular* . . .”

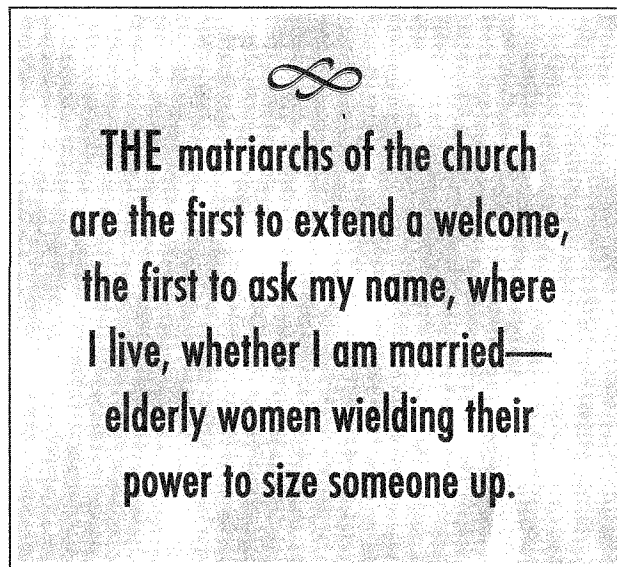
“Weh—ell?”

“From someone who could not stay at the *hotel* . . .”

“Weh—ell?”

Here pastors often begin in a whisper, and slowly, with the sermon as one text and the voices of the congregation another, build voice until the room is a sea of “*Say that!*,” “*Fix it! Fix it!*,” and “*Preach!*”—a call-and-response tradition whose template must be the creative play and reciprocity of life itself. On any morning the air is rich in metaphor: living water, the tender hand that lifted me, friend and comforter, redeemer, mighty maker, the lamb, the lily, the love divine. And yet on many days Brown must stand back at last from the pulpit and shake his head, having arrived at the border of silence, a depth of feeling where no words may go.

Among the traditions of this church are the testimonials



given before the official service begins. Every Sunday morning someone will stand up to give thanks because "He woke me up in my right mind this morning!" An octogenarian will rise to say "I'm breathing today, I have a roof over my head, and I'm *satisfied*!"

Listening to the clarified voices of one church, I, too, remember to be glad that I woke up in my right mind, glad for the roof, glad for breath. How simple it is, but it is, of course, *the* shift, the turn, the conversion from a constant whine to the bass note of gratitude. The turn is not an easy one for anyone in this culture, which treats all its citizens to the cruel premise that there is no such thing as enough. It could not have been easy for these elders, who have had more reason than most Americans to doubt Providence. What a subtle thing is going on here: at the same time that this community is steadily helping its members to gain a fair share of the nation's goods, it is steadily infusing material reality with another idea of wealth altogether.

I STUDIED LOVE

I studied love in my childhood in my childhood synagogue
in the women's section with the help of the women
 behind the partition
that locked up my mother with all the other women
 and girls.
But the partition that locked them up locked me up
on the other side. They were free in their love while I
 remained
locked up with all the men and boys in my love, my longing.
I wanted to be over there with them and to know their
 secrets
and say with them, "Blessed be He who has made me
according to his will." And the partition
a lace curtain white and soft as summer dresses, and
 that curtain
swaying to and fro with its rings and its loops,
lu-lu-lu loops, Lulu, lullings of love in the locked room.
And the faces of women like the face of the moon behind
 the clouds
or the full moon when the curtain parts: an enchanted
cosmic order. At night we said the blessing
over the moon outside, and I
thought about the women.

—YEHUDA AMICHAI

Translated by Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld

LIKE other black churches in America, this one is both an oasis and a center of community life: meals for the homeless, fashion shows, Kwanzaa celebrations, career-day fairs, scholarship awards, tribute dinners, lectures, and the purely social gatherings that Union refers to as "having a good time in the Lord." Once, the membership would have come largely from the immediate neighborhood, but because many African-American families have migrated to the suburbs, members now return from all points on the metropolitan and socioeconomic maps.

One morning the theme from the pulpit is inclusion—meant to address cultural diversity within the black community: the Caribbean, Afro-Latin, Euro-African, and African-American heritages represented in the congregation. Some of the things said: That we cannot be judging one another, for we don't know who might be an angel come into our midst. That cliques are forming in the church, and Reverend Brown does not like that. That the church is not the building, not the pastors, not the officials. The church is not the choirs, great and fine as they are. No, the church is *love*. And another thing—the pastor does not want to *hear* about anyone not coming to church because of not having the right thing to wear. He recalls being a small boy sent into church to secure a pew for the family, remembers rushing in without his coat, being stopped, and being told he could not come into church without a coat. "That brother didn't know if maybe I didn't *own* a coat," Brown fumes. "I will *never* forget that. Couldn't *come* into the church because I didn't have a coat! As long as I am pastor," he declares, "anybody can come in here in *anything*. If some raggedy person outside wants to come in, I'll go out and bring him in—*personally* set him down."

He means it, and the church describes itself as having "the widest doors in the city." This is a place that aspires to *communitas*, where society's distinctions are softened. So I, too, am welcomed. All visitors are warmly welcomed. But when it seems that I might become something more than an ephemeral visitor, a great tentativeness comes upon me. The church has long been black America's most precious institution, *the* institution that African-Americans control completely, a nurturing place of leaders, of artistry and mind—the place where a microcosm of sanity and goodness can be conjured. I can only imagine that many members must cherish one realm free of whites. ("Of white *control*," Reverend Brown later writes on a draft of this essay.)

Given history, and given the chosen apartness of many blacks in the post-civil-rights era, what the journalist Clarence Page has called the "social apartheid," does my presence diminish the creative refuge of this sanctuary? I don't yet know anyone in the congregation well enough to ask outright, and my smattering of African-American friends are either amused or appalled to learn that I am going to *any* church. Like me, these friends left organized religion long ago, and either are still getting over it or have taken refuge in the Buddha or in

their art, spending many Sundays, as I have also done, in one of nature's cathedrals, or in what Wallace Stevens memorably called the "complacencies of the peignoir."

The dearest of these friends looks at me earnestly. "You want to know what the members of that church are thinking about you? They're thinking, 'Uh oh, there goes the neighborhood!'" He holds his serious face a moment longer and then bursts out laughing. "I couldn't resist," he says. "Actually," he continues, now truly serious, "I have no idea what they're thinking. And you know better than to ask me that." He wags his finger at me. "Why do you assume I'll know what other black folk are thinking? You need to realize that your church is very different from the one I grew up in. We were never hallelujah people, except for my aunt Ethel. I grew up just like you did, in a Presbyterian church. And we were *quiet*. We were God's frozen people."

"One more thing," he adds firmly. "Don't get any ideas about me coming with you."

Another friend also levels with me. "Don't hope for a welcome from everyone," she says. "But remember, your spiritual life isn't *about* other people's approval." She pauses. "Now, if you don't mind me asking, girl, why are you going?"

MY reasons can be traced back very far, but as it happens, I began to attend this church named Union during the years when black and white Americans were beginning to say out loud that for all the gains we have made, we still do not know each other well, do not frequent each other's social worlds, and that the line may even be congealing again. In my life I have only rarely been in predominantly black gatherings, and almost never incidentally. Now, in Union's rooms, I am doing just a little of what African-Americans have done a good deal of for three centuries—sojourning in institutions dominated by another group, adapting, becoming adept at style switching. Crossing the color line is different, of course, for the historical oppressor than for the historically oppressed, and though I gain a keener sense of how it feels, viscerally, to be radically in the minority and to lack insider knowledge, assuming this status voluntarily, for a few hours each week among people of good will, is hardly a parallel to black America's experience.

Less agile at the crossing than are members of this community, in the beginning I am also hyperaware, ever mindful to present a positive face of whitedom—a self-conscious, walking-on-eggshells politesse that can make me clumsy. One morning, as I stand for a responsive reading, the hymnal in my hand grazes the head of an elderly man in the pew in front. Holy moley, I have hit an elderly black man on the head with a hymnal! I lean down to apologize, and as I do, the man turns his head to look at his wife, possibly thinking it was she who touched his head. He now receives a second shock—an unfamiliar white face looming just inches from his own—and he starts. He visibly jumps in the pew. His

startle startles me, and I jump too, and no one near us fails to see this scene. Most manage to keep a straight face, but the small boy next to me begins to giggle. His mother frowns at him and then at me, too, and as soon as possible the boy and I slink down in our pew, silently, side by side, both of us, for our own reasons, trying to contain ourselves.

In another church I might volunteer for something as a gesture of good intentions, but here I grasp that the most respectful thing is to do nothing. Is to wait. (And to try not to hit anyone else with a hymnal.) There is no quick, easy way to override the long accumulation of meaning that America has ascribed to color, and here there will be only personal answers to the matter of my presence, across the usual vagaries of human chemistry. A few members are cool at first, but the great majority are entirely gracious, and some—a retired professor, several of the deaconesses and pastors, and Union's great tenor, Emma Nance—go out of their way to give me clues and actual things to do, including proposal writing for the social-action committee. One day, after a meeting, I am in conversation with a woman who has become overworked at the church. She's going to take a break, she says, to take stock. I applaud her decision, and then observe that I am in the opposite situation, that my participation is limited—by history, I say. "Well," she replies, "some people do get stuck in the history. Oh, my, yes, the history is *there*—but it doesn't have to define us."

James Baldwin was thinking about how to negotiate this history when he predicted that any real dialogue between blacks and whites would require a personal confession from whites that is "a cry for help and healing," and a personal confession from blacks "which, fatally, contains an accusation." One Sunday not long after I find that passage, the Reverend Dr. Gilkes is in the pulpit. "I am talking about our men this morning," she says. "Our men can be paid to be entertainers and basketball stars, but the enemy will not open the doors of higher education! The enemy will not let our men become educated! And if one of us gets over, the enemy changes the rules!"

She catalogues the effects of the enemy's ways—the number of black men in prison, the number likely to die before the age of twenty-one—and she likens America's black men to Samson, who when shorn, blind, and imprisoned could yet summon a divine strength to crumble the house of his captivity. "We will tear *down* the enemy's walls," she says—her voice is blazing now, her arms are outstretched. The woman has reached with her voice down into the torment of centuries, and seems to be speaking for all that time. The other pastors stand and go to her, gathering around close, as if to hold and bank her cathartic fire. The wooden floor of Union begins to rumble under a slow stamping of feet, and the whole room is weeping.

Afterward, as I remain seated, sobered, Grainger Browning, the head of the social-action committee, comes up, greets

me in his usual ebullient manner, and lingers to ask, "What was that like for you, to hear that sermon—what I'd call a completely black sermon?" He pauses. "I mean," he continues, "it happens to us all the time, to be the only one in a crowd, hearing something from a completely white point of view, but what is it like for you to hear that kind of sermon?"

A retired professor of sociology, Dr. Browning is curious, and he is also being kind, guessing that I might feel, as of course I do, a mingling of implication and empathy. I form some words about solidarity, but my friend interrupts. "I know your politics," he says. "You probably agree with the sister more than I do. What I am asking is how did it *feel* to hear a sermon from a completely black point of view?" Before I can muster an answer, he continues. "You know, I don't think in terms of black or white much anymore. I really don't. Of course I notice. I'm not color-blind; I'm not that far yet. But I do not let it affect my actions. I check myself. And as a teacher, I made sure that I was fair to all my students. I think that a percentage of us now—not the majority, but maybe twenty percent of people, both black and white—will not divide along racial lines, will not let that happen again to our country. We are the people standing in the gap, just wanting to solve it."

MUCH of what happens in this great room happens in other rooms where people gather to think about meaning and to give thanks for the blooming universe. But some of what takes place here is unique to the black church tradition. One of the pastors makes an allusion to that uniqueness one day. She is praying. "Lord," she says, "we are the descendants of a people who *chose* to survive. We are *your* people, and we have come together this morning to worship you in a special way—for we have a special history, and a special way of knowing you."

The special world inside these walls is not an inversion of the pathology outside—that is, it is not a world of presumed black supremacy. The temptation to imagine such a place must be great, if only as poetic justice. And certainly African-Americans, who have long observed the debasing effect of racism on whites, may know a moral refinement that an oppressor cannot. But something more original than inversion is at work, a move that slips the knot of reaction. African-American spirituality comes in many varieties, of course, but the several Christian forms have common themes. Scholars in today's seminaries understand black theology as a distinctive interpretation of Christianity. Building

on African metaphysics, on a view of the universe as informed by benevolence, black American Christians have drawn especially on the social-justice teachings of Amos, Isaiah, Hosea, and Micah, on Christ's love for the neglected, and on the exodus into a promised land. The symbolic narrative of black Christianity is one of survival and resistance—and creativity. The story is told in highly allusive language that moves easily between stately and earthy tones, between redemption and fish fries—language that presents the temporal and the spiritual as inseparable.

Many have agreed with Martin Luther King Jr. that the African-American saga transcends its historical particulars to speak to common human hopes. For generations the black church has been at the heart of that saga, and Reverend Brown now speaks of his spiritual tradition as a body of thought that offers "correctives" to the dominant culture—a moral and intellectual discourse that issues a steady call for America to fulfill its promise.

We might think that a place that can do that—a place that fueled one of the great transformations of this society, and has preserved real community through the twentieth century—is a place that has some clues not only for its core members but for the larger community of the nation.

ENTERING slowly into the life of one church, I begin to grasp how many of my hopes for America, and even the style of my generation, can be traced to rooms like this one. "Oh, yes," Reverend Gilkes says one day in conversation. "Whites have always liberally borrowed elements of black spirituality and style. And white people love our spirituals, our music. But traditionally they have never accepted black *leadership*."

One morning, as we are singing "We'll walk in the light, beautiful light, Come where the dewdrops of mercy are bright," my eye happens to land on the mirror above the organ loft. A great swath of the congregation appears in the reflection, and among us is one jarringly pale face. "Who can that be?" I think, and am surprised, seconds later, to realize the answer. The wish to belong, to know and be known, is deep in us. And the wish to travel, to expand into the unknown, to carry messages across borders, is also deep. Both instincts are probably linked with survival, though the traveler is sometimes viewed with wariness. Hermes, the ancient god of travelers, is not only a guide but also a trickster, very like Eshu Elegbara, the African guardian of the crossroads, another of those changeful figures that show up in every culture.

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"TURN to your neighbor," the Reverend Jeffrey Brown says when he steps into the pulpit. "Say, 'Neighbor—'" "Neighbor—" the word swells up from several hundred congregants.

Old pagan emanations like Hermes and Eshu are probably not often admitted to the church basements of Christendom, but some kind of shape-shifter hovers there the first time I cook for a church supper. I have made a large pot of Portuguese kale soup, a hearty, fragrant soup that people have loved at my table for twenty years. I am attending my soup, which sits between a bubbling macaroni-and-cheese casserole and a huge bowl of rice and peas, from behind the buffet table, ladle in hand. The first people through the buffet line look at the unfamiliar soup skeptically.

"What is it?" one hungry teenage lad asks.

"Portuguese kale soup," I say proudly, ladle raised for action.

"I'll have the macaroni casserole, thank you."

Nine or ten more people in line give the soup one look and pass it up. My debut is not going well.

Finally someone comes along and asks, "Is it collard greens?"

"No, it's kale greens."

"No, thanks," he replies. But he has given me a clue.

"It's greens and beans," I say, truthfully, to the next person who asks—the choir director, Brother Philip.

"Oh, I'll have some," he says, and upon tasting this greens and beans, adds loudly, "It works for me."

Brother Philip's endorsement gets me two more takers, and then a young lady comes along and peers with interest at the soup.

"This looks like Italian minestrone," she says hopefully.

"Well, yes," I say. "It's a lot like minestrone—almost exactly."

The young woman has two helpings, and her girlfriend asks for the recipe. Hovering near the line, but not in it, is a young man who has obviously overheard the several names already given to this soup. Now he steps up to the buffet table with a sly grin.

"I wonder if your soup could be a jambalaya?"

"Yes," I say without hesitation or shame. "It's jambalaya."

"Oh, this is my lucky day," he says, chuckling. "So, if you will, please put that jambalaya over the rice and peas. Not too much sauce," he adds, showing me how to make the concoction. Tasting the mélange, he says, "That's *bug!*"

Now all this young man's friends want the bug jambalaya spooned over rice and peas—all except one young man with braids, who says *he* thinks my soup looks more like North African food.

"Isn't that North African beans?" he asks.

"North Africa is very near Portugal," I say.

ANYONE with my tendency toward travel does well to take stock of cautionary advisories. "We need to go over into those other racial and ethnic communities," the critic bell hooks said recently, "and we need to speak about what happens when we do, including what makes it hard."

But hooks excoriates whites who appropriate black culture in an exploitative fashion, and once nearly vaporized Camille Paglia, who imported some of her sassy style from gay black queens and has gone about enthusing over her rapport with African-Americans. "Whoaaa!" Paglia once gushed. "It's like I feel totally *myself*." That was too much for hooks, who wrote in response, "Naturally, all black Americans were more than pleased to have Miss Camille give us this vote of confidence, since we live to make it possible for white girls like herself to have a place where they can be 'totally' themselves." Similarly, Ward Churchill, a Native American writer, is furious that Euro-Americans have presumed to take up Native beliefs. (First you take our land, and now you want our spiritual treasure, too.) Neither hooks nor Churchill is lamenting the influences that peoples have on one another, which, they well know, can be stopped about as easily as the wind. Rather, they are distressed by the ways in which power imbalances distort exchanges between peoples.

Closely following the debates about identity within multi-racial and African-American communities engages me in thinking not only about how (and how much, and if, and where, and why) I may participate in elements of other identities, but also about how these social constructions may fare in an emerging transracial society. I find myself seeking out and listening to others grappling with the possibilities of more-permeable identities. In *Notes of a White Black Woman*, Judy Scales-Trent proposes that "the difficulty in understanding the notion of ethnicity comes from asking the wrong question all along. The question should not be 'Where did your people come from?' but rather 'What countries did your people travel through on their way here from Africa?'" And then, recalling the notorious "single drop" rule in America, by which any African ancestry rendered a citizen legally black, Scales-Trent offers a disarming proposal: "Those Americans who call themselves white," she says, "are all pretending to be something else—'passing.' . . . For Mother Africa is mother to us all."

During a conference given by the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute at Harvard, a widely traveled anthropologist stood in the audience to recount, with amusement, the chameleon nature of her identity. "In America," she says, "color-coded identities are the norm, so here I am a black woman. But to the South Sea Island tribe I study, all outsiders are *other*, and all others are identified by the word for 'white.' Visually, I am close to the islanders' color, but I am an outsider—therefore I am white! In Brazil I am seen as a member of *cultura branca*, white Western culture, as opposed to Afro-Brazilian culture, whereas in Europe I am perceived, first and foremost, not as black but as an American, second as a woman, third or fourth as a person of African descent. What color am I?" she asked the assemblage.

We try all our lives to be human, to know what kind we

are. It is not an easy job, and it can be encouraging to gather with those who seem like us. It can also be terrifically dangerous—so say the Eastern European poets and writers who have witnessed the power of the group to silence the individual conscience, who are trying to warn Americans about investing too much of our identity in any kind of ethnic or cultural tribalism. (Thinking about the recent savagery in the former Yugoslavia, the poet Charles Simic writes, “Here is something we can all count on. Sooner or later our tribe always comes to ask us to agree to murder.”)

Even for those of us with just the ordinary amount of displacement and assimilation, identity is a shifting thing these days. As the journalist Jim Sleeper has written, “We are all being ‘abducted’ from our ancient mythical wellsprings and moorings by forces we no longer control and do not fully comprehend.” What we will become is unknown, but many who are proud of their origins also value the freedom to claim the elective affinities of which Goethe spoke. Those who feel that matters of realpolitik power and control underlie and sculpt many aspects of identity are undeniably right. Even political and physical survival can sometimes be at stake in maintaining strong group identity. Plainly, though, for a learning species like ours, which has moved slowly over the globe, gleaning from others is not a denial of native identity but a true and fundamental part of it. The writer Richard Rodriguez surprised and delighted an audience in Miami one winter by saying that it is the Maya Indian in him that loves Shakespeare, that likes to wear Milanese suits, that is nimble and adventurous enough to say, “*Yo soy chino*,” “*Yo soy italiano*,” “*Yo soy inglés*” (which, Rodriguez puckishly noted, he was saying in the language of the conquistadors).

I am thinking about these matters when Roots Day is announced—that day each year in late spring when, as Reverend Brown merrily phrases it, worshippers are invited to come “wearing as much African garb as you have Africa in your heart.” This comment is meant to set people with different stylistic preferences at ease, but it might have caused me considerable wardrobe deliberation that first year had I not forgotten which Sunday was Roots Day and arrived in my usual 1940s-style gray-silk suit. But many others wear their regular outfits too, including one mainstay of the church, a tall, elegant man in his late fifties, who arrives wearing his standard double-breasted charcoal suit, and is greeted by a woman in the lobby. “Deacon, is that old suit how much Africa you have in your heart?”

“My sister,” he replies easily, “I wore dashikis all through the seventies, and to tell you the truth, I am just about *dashikied out*.”

More difficult than the wardrobe question is the label on which I am to write the name of my root place—“the place you come from,” a little sign on the table says. How should my label read? Where is that place? A man next to me writes “Georgia” in felt-tip pen, peels away the backing,

and presses the label to his chest. Others are writing “Jamaica,” “Gambia,” “Congo-Angola.” All the tags point to history’s diasporas and migrations. I stand at the table, pen in hand. Members rustle around the table in an array of African robes, kente cloth, turbans, dashikis—the sisters presenting themselves in what the scholar Cornel West has described as a rich stylization. Deaconess Lillian Allen approaches the table, stands next to me, and writes on her label, “West Africa and Massachusetts.” As she peels off the backing and taps the label onto her dress, she notices my hesitation. She touches my arm lightly, looks me in the eyes, and says, “You’re home now.”

ONCE, for a few weeks, I was completely at home in a place called Aphrodite’s Rooms-To-Let. I have been at home walking among Brancusi’s polished bronze eggs, hunched over tide pools at the edge of several seas, in red-clay fields, and on the eastern shore of Chincoteague, eating blue crabs that my father had caught with a string. Like so many other homes, the one I have found in this community is comforting, quickening, haunting, exquisite, and thorny—sometimes all at once. With one hand I take communion with a congregation, and we are the body together. Meanwhile, my other hand is caught in stubborn patterns no individual gesture can undo, most especially the myriad built-in affirmative-action programs for white America, all those privileges so nearly invisible to many whites. Doubtless, too, there are inscapes of understanding that pass me by in these rooms, but on Roots Day, as we stand by the folding card table, Deaconess Lillian leaves her hand on my arm a moment longer. “Some things transcend,” she says.

Then she must hurry to join the choir, which is readying for its entrance procession—a procession made in a slow, syncopated step, led by a grandmother, a line that can send you into a long meditation on the one and the many. Nearby, Dr. Browning is buttonholing people to buy space in the Men’s Fellowship calendar. “For five dollars,” he says, “you can put up to five names, birthdays and anniversaries, in the calendar. How many may I put you down for?” Three children run up the carpeted stairs with tambourines in hand.

“Turn to your neighbor,” Reverend Brown says when he steps into the pulpit. “Your neighbor is the one next to you,” he adds, deadpan. “Say, ‘Neighbor—’”

“Neighbor—” the word swells up from several hundred congregants, amused by their pastor’s playful side.

“Neighbor, you look *maaahvelous* this morning.”

The Reverend Zina Jacque-Bell comes to the pulpit. “And now,” she says, “please turn with me to that great old hymn of the church, number two hundred and twenty-two in your books. But you won’t need your books; you know the words: ‘We’ve come this far by faith . . . Oh—Can’t turn around.’ No, we can’t turn around.

“Everyone who can stand, please stand.” ☘

AMERICAN FLAMINGO

by GREG PAPE

I know he shot them to know them.
I did not know the eyes of the flamingo
are blue, a deep live blue.

And the tongue is lined with many small
tongues, thirteen, in the sketch
by Audubon, to function as a sieve.

I knew the long rose-pink neck,
the heavy tricolored down-sweeping bill,
the black primaries.

But I did not know the blue eye
drawn so passionately by Audubon
it seems to look out, wary, intense,

from the paper it is printed on.

—what

Is man but his passion?

asked Robert Penn Warren. In the background
of this sketch, tenderly subtitled *Old Male*,
beneath the over-draping feathered

monument of the body, between the long
flexible neck and the long bony legs
covered with pink plates of flesh,

Audubon has given us eight postures,
eight stunning movements in the ongoing
dance of the flamingos.



Once at Hialeah in late afternoon
I watched the satin figures of the jockeys
perched like bright beetles on the backs

of horses pounding down the home
stretch, a few crops whipping
the lathering flanks, the loud flat

metallic voice of the announcer fading
as the flamingos, grazing the pond water
at the far end of the infield, rose

in a feathery blush, only a few feet
off the ground, and flew one long
clipped-winged ritual lap

in the heavy Miami light, a great
slow swirl of grace from the old world
that made tickets fall from hands,

stilled horses, and drew toasts from the stands
as they settled down again
like a rose-colored fog on the pond.

Everything in This Country Must

by COLUM McCANN

Father stayed in the river holding the root, and
the water was hitting his shoulders and he was sad watching
the draft horse die like everything does

IT was a summer flood when our draft horse was caught in the river and the river smashed against stones. The sound of it to me was like the turning of locks. It was silage time, and the water smelled of grass. The draft horse, Father's favorite, had stepped in the river for a sniff maybe, and she was caught, couldn't move, her foreleg trapped between rocks. Father found her and called, *Katie!* above the wailing of the rain. I was in the barn, waiting for drips on my tongue from the ceiling hole. I ran out past the farmhouse into the field. At the river the horse stared wild through the rain; maybe she remembered me. Father moved slow and scared, like someone traveling deep in snow except there was no snow, just flood, and Father was frightened of water, always frightened. Father told me, *Out on the rock there, girl.* He gave me the length of rope with the harness clip, and I knew what to do. I am taller than Father since my last birthday, fifteen. I stretched wide like love and put one foot on the rock in the river middle and one hand on the tree branch above it and swung out over the river flood.

Behind me Father said, *Careful now hai.* The water ran warm and fast, like girl blood, and I held the tree branch, still able to lean down from the rock and put the rope to the halter of the lovely draft horse.

The trees went down to the river in a whispering, and they hung their long branches over the water, and the horse jerked quick and sudden, and I felt there would be a dying, but I pulled the rope up to keep her neck above water.

Father was shouting, *Hold it, girl!* and I could see his teeth clenched and his eyes wide and all the traveling of

veins in his neck, the same as when he walks the ditches of our farm, many cows, hedgerows, fences. Father is always full of ditches and fright for the losing of Mammy and Fiachra and now his horse, his favorite, a big Belgian mare that cut fields once in the peaceful dark soil of long ago.

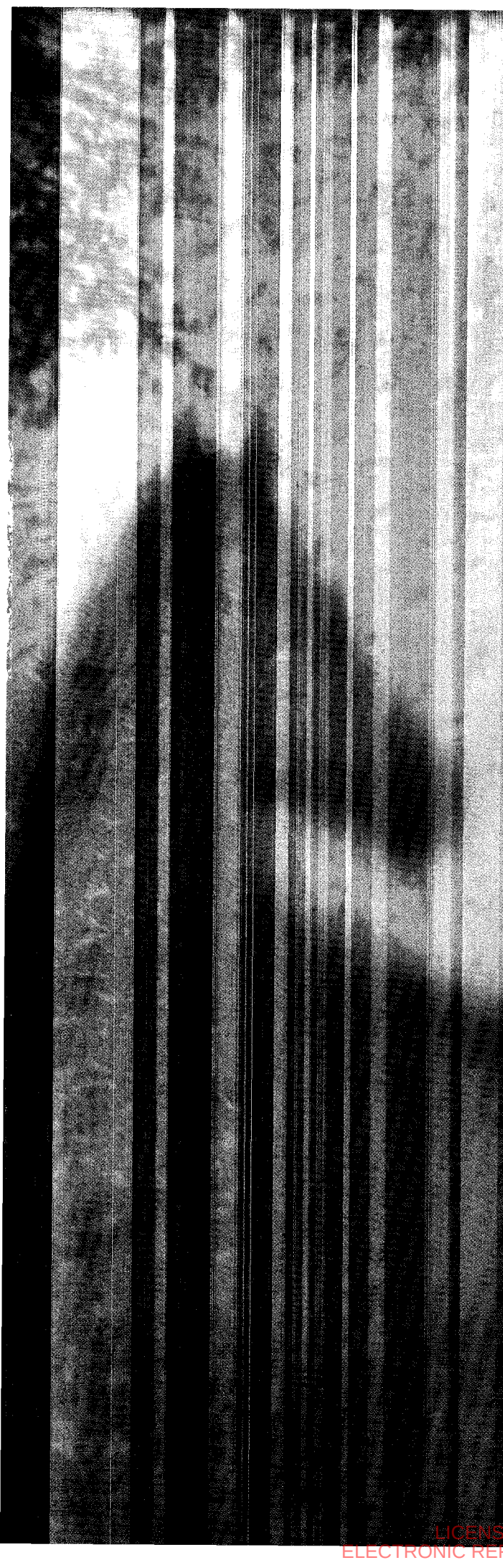
The river split at the rock and jumped fast into sprays coming up above my feet into my dress. But I held tight to the rope, held it like Father sometimes holds his last Sweet Afton cigarette at mealtime before prayers. Father was shouting, *Keep it there, girl, good!* He was looking at the water as if Mammy was there, as if Fiachra was there, and he gulped air and down he went in the water and he was gone so long he made me wail to the sky for being alone. He kept a strong hold of one tree root but all the rest of his body went away under the quick brown water.

The night had started stars. They were up through the branches. The river was spraying in them.

Father came up splutter spluttering for air with his eyes all horsewild and his cap lost down the river. The rope was jumping in my hands and burning like oven rings, and he was shouting, *Hold it, girl, hold it, for the love of God hold it, please!*

Father went down in the water again but came up early, no longer enough in his lungs to keep down. He stayed in the river holding the root, and the water was hitting his shoulders and he was sad watching the draft horse die like everything does, but still I pulled on the halter rope so it would not, because Molly in the sweet shop told me it is not always so.

One more try, Father said in a sad voice like his voice over Mammy and Fiachra's coffins long ago.



FATHER dipped under and he stayed down as long as yesterday's yesterday, and then some headlights came sweeping up the town road. The lights made a painting of the rain way up high and they put shadows on the hedgerows and ditches. Father's head popped out of the water and he was breathing heavy, so he didn't see the light. His chest was wide and jumping. He looked at the draft horse and then at me. I pointed up the road and he turned in the flood and stared. Father smiled, maybe thinking it was Mack Devlin with his milk truck or Molly coming home from the sweet shop or someone come to help save his favorite horse. He dragged on the tree root and out-struggled from the river and stood on the bank, and his arms went up in air like he was waving, shouting, *Over here over here hai!*

Father's shirt was wet under his overalls and it was very white when the headlights hit it. The lights got close close closer, and in the brightening we heard shouts and then the voices came clear. They sounded like they had swallowed things I never swallowed. I looked at Father and he looked at me all of a sudden with the strangest of faces, like he was lost, like he was punched, like he was the river cap floating, like he was a big alone tree desperate for forest. Someone shouted out, *Hey, mate, what's goin' on?* in a strange strange way, and Father said, *Nothing*, and his head dropped to his chest and he looked across the river at me and I think what he was telling me was *Drop the rope, girl*, but I didn't. I kept it tight, holding the draft horse's neck above the water, and all the time Father was saying but not saying, *Drop it, please, Katie, drop it, let her drown.*

THEY came right quick through the hedge, with no regard for the uniforms that hide them. One took off his helmet while he was running, and his hair was the color of winter ice. One had a moustache that looked like long grasses, and one had a scar on his cheek like the bottom end of Father's barn hay knife.

HayKnife was first to the edge of the river, and his rifle banged against his hip when he jumped out to the rock where I was halter-holding. *Okay, love, you're all right now*, he said to me, and his hand was rain-wet at my back, and he took the halter and shouted things to the other soldiers, what to do, where to stand. He kept ahold of the halter and passed me back to LongGrasses, who caught my hand and brought me safely to the riverbank. There were six of them now, all guns and helmets. Father didn't move. His eyes were steady looking at the river, maybe seeing Mammy and Fiachra in each eye of the draft horse, staring back.

One soldier was talking to him loud and fast, but Father was like a Derry shop-window dummy, and the soldier threw up his arms and turned away through the rain and spat a big spit into the wind.

HayKnife was all balance on the rock with the halter, and

he didn't even hold the branch above his head. IceHair was taking off his boots and gun and shirt and he looked not like boys from town who come to the barn for love, he looked not like Father when Father cuts hay without his shirt, no, he looked not like anybody; he was very skinny and strong with ribs like sometimes a horse has after a long day in the field. He didn't dive like I think now I would have liked him to, he just stepped into the water very slow and not show-offy and began making his way across, arms high in the air getting lower. But the river got too deep and HayKnife shouted from the rock, saying, *Stay high, Stevie, stay high side, mate.*

And Stevie gave a thumb up to HayKnife and then he was down under the water and the last thing was the kick of the feet.

LongGrasses was standing beside me and he put Stevie's jacket on my shoulders to warm me, but then Father came over and pushed LongGrasses away. Father pushed hard. He was smaller than LongGrasses, but LongGrasses bashed against the trunk of the tree. LongGrasses took a big breath and stared hard at him. Father said, *Leave her alone, can't you see she's just a child?* I covered my face for shame, like in school when they put me in class at a special desk bigger than the rest, not the wooden ones with lifting lids, except I don't go to school anymore since Mammy and Fiachra died. I felt shame like the shame of that day, and I covered my face and peeped through my fingers.

Father was giving a bad look to LongGrasses. LongGrasses stared at Father for a long time too and then shook his head and walked away to the riverbank where Stevie was still down in the water.

Father's hands were on my shoulders, keeping me warm, and he said, *It'll be all right now, love*, but I was only thinking about Stevie and how long he was under water. HayKnife was shouting at the top of his voice and staring down into the water, and I looked up and saw the big army truck coming through the hedgerow fence and the hedge was broken open with a big hole and Father screamed *No!* The extra lights of the truck were on and they were lighting up all the river. Father screamed again, *No!* but stopped when one of the soldiers stared at him. *Your horse or your bloody hedge, mate.*

Father sat down on the riverbank and said, *Sit down, Katie*, and I could hear in Father's voice more sadness than when he was over Mammy's and Fiachra's coffins, more sadness than the day after they were hit by the army truck down near the Glen, more sadness than the day the judge said, *Nobody is guilty, it's just a tragedy*, more sadness than even that day and all the other days that follow.

Bastards, Father said in a whisper, *bastards*, and he put his arm around me and sat watching until Stevie came up from the water swimming against the current to stay in one place. He shouted up at HayKnife, *Her leg's trapped*, and then, *I'm gonna try and get the hoof out*. Stevie took four big

gulps of air and HayKnife was pulling on the halter rope and the draft horse was screaming like I never heard a horse before or after. Father was quiet and I wanted to be back in the barn alone, waiting for drips on my tongue. I was wearing Stevie's jacket but I was shivering and wet and cold and scared, because Stevie and the draft horse were going to die, since everything in this country must.

FATHER likes his tea without bags, like Mammy used to make, and so there is a special way for me to make it. Put cold cold water in the kettle, and only cold, and boil it, and then put a little boiling water in the teapot and swish it around until the bottom of the teapot is warm. Then put in tea leaves, not bags, and then the boiling water, and stir it all very slowly and put on the tea cozy and let it stew on the stove for five minutes, making sure the flame is not too high so the tea cozy doesn't catch flame and burn. Then pour milk into the cups and then the tea, followed at last by the sugar all spooned around into a careful mixture.

My tea fuss made the soldiers smile, even Stevie, who had a head full of blood pouring down from where the draft horse kicked him above his eye. Father's face went white when Stevie smiled, but Stevie was very polite. He took a towel from me because he said he didn't want to get blood on the chair. He smiled at me two times when I put my head around the kitchen door, and he held up one finger, meaning *One sugar, please*, and a big O from fingers for *No milk, please*. Some blood was drying in his hair, and his eyes were bright like the sky should be, and I could feel my belly sink way down until it was there like love in the barn, and he smiled at me number three.

Everyone felt good for saving a life, even a horse life, maybe even Father, but Father was silent in the corner. He was angry at me for asking the soldiers to tea, and his chin was long to his chest and there was a puddle at his feet. Everybody was towel-drying except Father and me, because we had not enough towels.

LongGrasses sat in the armchair and said, *Good thing ya had heat lamps, guvnor.*

Father just nodded.

How was it under the water, Stevie? LongGrasses said.

Wet, Stevie said, and everybody laughed but not Father. He stared at Stevie and then looked away.

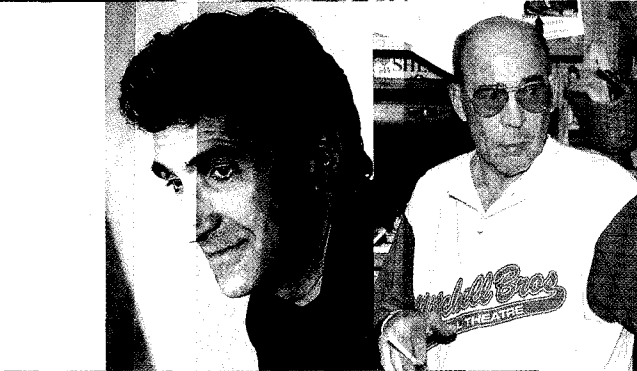
The living room is always dark with Father grim, but it was brighter now. I liked the green of the uniforms and even the red of Stevie's blood. But Stevie's head from the horse kick must have been very sore. The other soldiers were talking about how maybe the army truck should take Stevie straight off to hospital and not get dry, just get stitches, and not get tea, just come back later to see about the draft horse if she survives under the heat lamps. But Stevie said, *I'm okay, guys, it's just a scrape. I'd kill for a cuppa.*



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The tea was good-tasting from long brewing, and we had biscuits for special visitors. I fetched them from the pantry. I tasted one to make sure they were fresh-tasting and I carried out the tray.

I was sneezing but I was very careful to sneeze away from the tray so as to have politeness like Stevie. Stevie said, *God bless you* in his funny funny way, and we were all quiet as we sipped on the tea, but I sneezed again three four five times, and HayKnife said, *You should change out of them wet clothes, love.*

Father put down his teacup very heavy on the saucer and it was very quiet.

Everyone, even the soldiers, looked at the floor, and the mantelpiece clock was ticking and Mammy's picture was staring down from the wall, and Fiachra when he was playing football, and the soldiers didn't see them but Father did. The long silence was longer and longer until Father called me over, *Come here, Katie*, and he stood me by the window and he took the long curtain in his hands. He turned me around and wrapped the curtain around me and he took my hair and started rubbing not tender but hard. Father is good; he was just wanting to dry my hair because I was shivering even in Stevie's jacket. From under the curtain I could see the soldiers and I could see most of all Stevie. He sipped from his tea and smiled at me, and Father coughed real loud and the clock ticked some more until HayKnife said, *Here, guv, why don't you use my towel for her?*

Father said, *No, thanks.*

HayKnife said, *Go on, guv*, and he put the towel in a ball and made about to throw it.

Father said, *No!*

Stevie said, *Take it easy.*

Take it easy? HayKnife said.

Maybe you should all leave, Father said.

HayKnife changed his face and threw the towel on the ground at Father's feet, and HayKnife's cheeks were out-puffing and he was breathing hard and he was saying, *Fat lot of fuckin thanks we get from your sort, mister.*

HayKnife was up on his feet now and pointing at Father, and the light shone off his boots well polished, and his face was twitching so the scar looked like it was cutting his face. LongGrasses and Stevie stood up from the chairs and were holding HayKnife back, but HayKnife was saying, *Risk our fuckin lives and save your fuckin horse and that's all the thanks we get, eh?*

Father held me very tight with the curtain wrapped around me, and he seemed scared and small and trembly. HayKnife was shouting lots and his face was red and scrunched. Stevie kept him back. Stevie's face was long and sad and I knew he knew because he kept looking at Mammy and Fiachra on the mantelpiece beside the ticking clock. Stevie dragged HayKnife out from the living room and at the kitchen door he let go. HayKnife turned over Stevie's shoulder one last time and

looked at Father with his face all twisted, but Stevie grabbed him again and said, *Forget it, mate.*

Stevie took HayKnife out through the kitchen door and into the yard toward the army truck, and still the rain was coming down outside, and then the living room was quiet except for the clock.

I heard the engine of the army truck start.

Father stood away from me and put his head on the mantelpiece near the photos. I stayed at the window still in Stevie's jacket, which Stevie forgot and hasn't come back for yet.

I watched the truck as it went down the laneway, and the red lights on the green gate as it stopped and then turned into the road past where the draft horse was lifted from the river. I didn't hear anything then, just Father starting low noises in his throat, and I didn't turn from the window because I knew he would be angry for me to see him. Father was sniff sniffing. Maybe he forgot I was there. It was going right down into him and it came in big gulps like I never heard before. I stayed still, but Father was trembling big and fast. He took out a handkerchief and moved away from the mantelpiece. I didn't watch him because I knew he would be shamed for his crying.

The army truck was near out of sight, red lights on the hedgerows.

I heard the living room door shut, then the kitchen door, then the pantry door where Father keeps his hunting rifle, then the front door, and I heard the sounds of the clicker on the rifle and him still crying going farther and farther away until they were gone, and he must have been in the courtyard standing in the rain.

The clock on the mantelpiece sounded very loud, so did the rain, so did my breathing, and I looked out the window.

It was all near empty on the outside road, and the soldiers were going around the corner when I heard the sounds, not like bullets, more like pops one two three, and the echo of them came loud to me.

The clock still ticked.

It ticked and ticked and ticked.

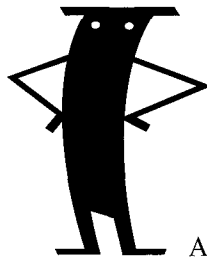
The curtain was wet around me, but I pulled it tight. I was scared, I couldn't move. I waited it seemed like forever.

When Father came in from outside I knew what it was. His face was like it was cut from a stone and he was not crying anymore and he didn't even look at me, just went to sit in the chair. He picked up his teacup and it rattled in his fingers, so he put it down again and put his face in his hands and stayed like that. The ticking was gone from my mind, and all was quiet everywhere in the world, and I held the curtain like I held the sound of the bullets going into the draft horse's head, his favorite, in the barn, one two three, and I stood at the window in Stevie's jacket and looked and waited and still the rain kept coming down outside one two three one two three one two three and I was thinking oh, what a small sky for so much rain. ☁

The Writing Life

by IAN FRAZIER

*The rigors of high-yield
creativity*



AM A WRITER, of course, but I also have writers. What with all the writing I do, I am often forced to hire writers to handle some of the lesser chores. When it comes to the actual *writing* writing, however, I always do that myself, with no further input from my writers. At the moment I have a staff of forty-two, up from thirty-six last year. Don't ask me where I get them. Some are lifers, some are pink-cheeked college kids fresh out of schools that cost more per year than my first ten cars. I pay them plenty, and sign the checks myself so that they don't forget: I'm the capital-W Writer, singular; they're the writers. That's *erzzz*, as in *writers*, plural. Basically they're a bunch of white guys with mortgages and Barneys suits and Lhasa apsos they carry around with them in hotel garment bags, or some such. I try never to meet them face to face unless I have to. They're always distracted, slightly confused, lost in another marvelous fiction they're spinning in their heads—and on my dime, too.

Some are strays, friends of friends. Some of them get all huffy if you don't remember their names. They get over that pretty quick, usually. If I remembered the name of every writer that came through here, I'd go insane. Why would I even want to? I always remember the name of the head writer, the guy who reports to me, because it's always Stefano. I wake up in the morning, I reach across my trademark enormous stomach, I pick up the phone, and I say, "Stefano." Just the one word, and he's there at the other end, down in the writers' warren, wherever the hell that is. I say, "Stefano, I feel like writing today. Hop to." Writing is all a matter of discipline. From this point on I'm writing, in the sense that my writing is being done. Nothing else will exhaust you as much as turning yourself inside out in that way. It's something you can't understand until you've tried it—this emptying of the soul, this leap onto the next ice floe in the unknown. And all

without the petty consolation of the actual physical nuts and bolts of it, the words, periods, commas, parentheses, and—what're those other things? The thing that's a period on top of a comma? It makes me almost envy the writers sometimes.

The object of what I write is to move the gods to tears, and for that you've got to be loaded. I recommend debenture bonds. The returns from them, plus the tax advantage, let me capitalize my operation up to where I want it to be. But you can't just leave the money lying around; you've got to know how to apply it. That's where poetics comes into play and real writing begins. First you need a recognition factor, which, thanks to all the media uproar, I already had. Then you need a good headhunter; fortunately, I can do that job on my own. I've been hiring staff since I was in the third grade. I had to, for all the projects and book reports. So if there's one thing I know, it's handling writers. Originally they were all DPs

(displaced persons), so happy to be working that they'd write for jacks. A dozen jacks and a rubber ball, and I'm in the writing business. I was nine.

Back then I had no clear idea of what I wanted to do. I was just writing along day to day, meeting a payroll and making a comfortable living. I could've gone on like that forever, I suppose. But one day a great and breathtaking ambition came over me. I said to my then-wife, "I want to forge within the foundry of my self the yet-unrealized dreams of humankind, and make eight million dollars a year." Eight million dollars was a lot of money in those days. The next step was to take a hard look at my staff. Did I have writers of the caliber that was capable of taking my writing to where I wanted it to be? Regrettably, the answer was no. My writers had become soft and complacent, so naturally my writing had suffered. I fired everybody and began to rebuild from the ground up.

First off, I hired Faulkner. People always ask, "You mean *the* Faulkner?" Truth is, it was so long ago I don't remember for sure. It could have been—it was definitely *a* Faulkner, that much I do know, because I made out the time sheets. And he had a southern accent, I recall. Well, that was what I was looking for, that southern deep-dish gothic whatever, and I knew he'd provide it. But what's really important in great writing isn't just the one note; it's the mix. Let me say that again: *It's the mix*. So I shopped around. I got a bunch of South American surrealist-symbolist what-do-you-call-its from someplace I can't pronounce who definitely did not come cheap, and Jackie Susann, and Bill Coffin from Yale, and a half dozen guys who used to write for Jack and Johnny. It sounds unbelievable that I could go from zero to a staff like that virtually overnight. All I can say is, they're out there if you know where to look.

LIKE most creative and wealthy people, I can be a bit of a monster sometimes. All my writers know this, and take it into account. The ones that last develop a sense of when to keep their heads down. I have access to people and situations they can't begin to understand, and I'm dealing on a daily basis with writing problems at a global level involving amounts of words and money of which the average person could have no grasp. Let me give you an example.

No, I can't even do that. I shouldn't even have brought it up. There is no example, there is only the thing itself, as Spillane said. Besides, that stuff is privileged information that I don't have to give out, because I'm privately held. Most of it has become a matter of public record now, and I would have nothing to add to what was said at the hearings. And if you think you're going to get any more from my writers than you would from me, you're not. They are under orders not to divulge information under any circumstances, or to write any books or sign anything or allow any impression, deliberate or otherwise, that they have any knowledge having to do with me. This is something I insisted on up front. So don't come to me now claiming you were never told. Why are we

even arguing about this? We all have a common goal, which is that my writers write only what is appropriate for the writing I want to do—no more and no less. After all, that's what I'm paying them for.

Writing like mine requires great management. In the past most writing was done in a piecemeal, one-at-a-time fashion, using inefficient hand-powered technologies, without knowledge of modern methods of cooperative organization. Today we understand how wasteful that was. Large numbers of writers out on their own and scattered all over the place, working on a mass of books that would take a long time to read—well, naturally that system had to change. Marshaling all these voices into a coherent whole is the job of a writer of broader vision, like me. I think of myself as a synthesizer-slash-poet. Not to get too shoptalky here, but it's at this poetic-marketing interface that my most significant writing is done. Of course, in the end what's really important isn't the success that I achieve—it's the writing itself. The writing I do is not only bigger than the many people on my staff, it's also bigger than I am. It goes out into the world and has its own life. I firmly believe that if something I write touches the heart of just one other person, and the person is Michael Eisner, then I will not have wholly failed.

As for my writers, they live the life of Riley. I give them competitive wages, overtime, negotiable benefits, and an illustrated pamphlet explaining how they can join an HMO. They get steady employment, plus the satisfaction of picking up an epic-poetry song cycle or a *roman à clef* about the movie industry by me and pointing to a line in it and telling their attorneys, "Hey! I wrote that!" And yet when pub date comes, it's my *glebkas* on the line, not theirs. Why else do you think I've got a stack of applications a foot high on my dressing table? It's a dream job, especially for a part-timer. Five of the last six Chief Justices of the U.S. Supreme Court have written for me part-time. To a man, they said it was the best job they'd ever had.

Nowadays I don't have to go looking for writers. They come to me—which is good, because I prefer not to leave the compound. Tahoe, or what I can see of it from the deck, is the most beautiful place in the world. Even when I have to go someplace to meet with other people in the writing business, I like to take the Gulfstream and fly back the same day. That just works better for me. Everything I need is here. When the writing is going smoothly, the air seems to hum. Via my writers, I sometimes produce tens of thousands of words a day, and I still have time for an active home life and career. The writing I don't use myself I can sell to various markets, so I ship it to buyers and agents, and it's out of my hands. After a lifetime of writing, I have entered my own personal *belle époque*. Thanks to a highly developed ability to delegate, I've reached a point where I'm expressing stuff I didn't know I had in me and wouldn't recognize if I did. I often tell the media that I owe it all to my writers. But of course that isn't true. ☛





Dark Passage

*Descending into the depths of California's
longest known cave*

I DROP to my belly in the grit and mud, and slither beneath a fanged curtain of marble into the Dragon's Teeth Room. The small chamber lies deep underground in a Sierran canyon east of Fresno, California. When I regain my feet, Carol Vesely directs the conical glow of her

by Andrew Todhunter

head lamp toward the all but invisible aperture through which I just passed. "Take a good look at that," she says, "because on your way out you'll want to remember it." There are nine outlets leading in all directions from the chamber, several of them clearly visible. But this cave, worn

out of the marble by water rushing or trickling through its fissures for millennia, has hardly been designed for human use, and the appropriate exits are not convenient, intuitive, or marked. The low, emphatically uninviting feature that gives this room its name does not even resemble an egress: the navigable passage immediately behind the teeth rises steeply for some feet and appears to be a continuation of the chamber's irregular wall. But it is the only passage from this region of the cave that leads to the sun. I nod, forewarned, and commit the lithic maw to confident memory.

Vesely, now forty-one, is "the epitome of the gung-ho woman caver in this country," according to the caving historian Ernst Kastning. "She is right there with the best of the men. And she can outdo a lot of them." In twenty-one years Vesely has made a thousand trips into 350 caves in fifteen countries, including the United States, Mexico, Austria, China, Papua New Guinea, and Belize. The chair of the National Speleological Society's Survey and Cartography Section, she has surveyed more than seventy-five miles of underground passage worldwide. In 1986, with her husband, Bill Farr, Vesely discovered Cueva Cheve, in Mexico. Currently known to be 15.7 miles long and 4,547 feet deep, Cheve is the second-deepest known cave in the Western Hemisphere.

At five feet four and 120 pounds, Vesely is slight and small-boned. Her blonde hair, worn long in a ponytail, is graying. She wears broad-lensed eyeglasses and no makeup, and might strike one in passing as a schoolteacher or an academic. In fact, until recently she worked as a substitute teacher near her home in Monrovia, California, and she is her dissertation shy of a Ph.D. in cognitive developmental psychology from the University of California at Santa Barbara. In addition to holding two part-time jobs, Vesely now works as a full-time mother. At the moment, her two-year-old son, Brian, awaits her on the surface, in the company of his father, at a rebuilt miners' cabin minutes from the cave's north entrance. A laser designer, electrical engineer, and computer scientist, Bill Farr is a speleophile

with an extreme if not morbid fondness for cave diving, or scuba diving in subterranean waters.

One of the first things one learns from cavers is that they are categorically opposed to the term "spelunker." A spelunker, I gather, is anyone who wanders ill-advisedly into a cave without adequate equipment or training. Not even young Brian Farr is a spelunker—he has already accompanied his parents into fifteen caves.

I have visited a number of commercial and wild or semi-wild caves, in places from Oregon and South Dakota to Crete. Some of these were neon-lit and miserable, advertised on billboards along American highways; others were dark and undeveloped and beautiful. In one Colorado cave, I stumbled on a small subterranean lake edged by a perfect crescent of sand. Virgin passage, however (terrain unseen by man or woman), is something I have never encountered. When the opportunity arose to join Vesely and sixteen other veteran cavers for a weekend of exploration and survey at Lilburn, the longest known cave in California, I thought it might be my chance. I gradually set my hopes, in fact, on discovering a chamber—however small—and naming it for my infant daughter, Julia.

Lilburn has nearly sixteen miles of known passage and much that remains unexplored. The cavers have split up into several teams, each planning to explore or survey a different section of the cave. My group includes Vesely, Roger Mortimer, and Art Fortini. Mortimer, thirty-three, is a physician in family practice and an AIDS consultant from Fresno. Fortini is a thirty-five-year-old chemical engineer and a mountaineer and alpine Search and Rescue volunteer living in Pasadena. Both men have been caving since 1984. At five feet six and 130 pounds, Fortini is well proportioned for subterranean travel. Stripped to his long johns, he looks very nearly capable of entering a house through the cat door. Our group is also accompanied temporarily by Marianne Russo, an archaeologist, and Bill Frantz, a computer-security expert. Russo, forty-five, has fifteen years of caving experience. Frantz, fifty-three, has been caving for nearly thirty years.

A caver's standard equipment includes

boots, durable and preferably waterproof coveralls and gloves, a helmet, an electric or carbide head lamp, spare batteries or carbide, no fewer than two reserve light sources, and a small pack containing food, water, a first-aid kit, and extra layers of clothing. Many cavers also wear one or more layers of synthetic long underwear, kneepads, and, in a cold cave like Lilburn, a hat or a balaclava. In warmer caves (the temperature in some caves in Mexico hovers at more than 100°) cavers may strip to their shorts or skin. Not only is this more comfortable, but it decreases the cavers' cumulative, inevitably destructive impact on delicate surfaces and formations. For sections involving climbing or rappelling, cavers carry harnesses, caving rope, and climbing hardware. Cave divers must haul scuba gear from the mouth of the cave to the dive site—commonly a sump, or submerged passage.

WE aim to investigate several leads in an area of Lilburn known as the Schreiber Complex. One of the leads is marked cryptically on the map "Hard climb—Roger knows the way." Not our Roger; the note was scrawled several years ago by an unknown hand.

Frantz is particularly familiar with this area of the cave and will guide us to a turnoff close to the climbing lead. We follow him wordlessly in single file, ducking and crawling and creeping, scooting and sliding on our heels and backsides, climbing and crabbing over boulders as big as cottages. The marble is speckled or striped or swirled in combinations of black and white and blue-gray. The patterns are wild and artful, apparently random like the forms and hollows themselves, which endlessly constrict and broaden, arcing and twisting, rising and climbing and dropping away into darkness. The cave is cool at 46°, and damp. The stone sweats; water pools in low places. The nether reaches of the cave have flooded periodically, and a sediment of granitic sand covers parts of the passage floor. In places the marble is concealed, spackled by the ebbing waters with a coat of fine sand that falls away under a glove.

We are traveling unroped, exposing ourselves to falls, as Mortimer later observes, to a degree that we might not tolerate under the all-revealing light of day.



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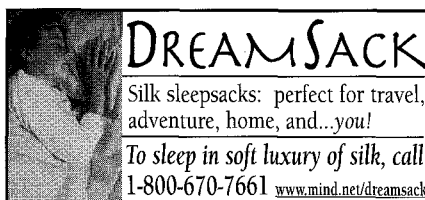
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In the selective gleam of my head lamp a yawning ravine to the right—its shadowed depths chaotic with cracked blocks, lunging tusks, and broad, gently curving sails of marble—is less intimidating the moment I direct my gaze to the narrow,

a cave's evolution. I contemplate the densely packed jumble of mud and marble chunks, and reflect that the trick is to make sure you're not around when it happens. While Vesely studies the map, Mortimer and Fortini make short recon-

through the cave, which is steady and athletic, our surveying is slow and painstaking work. Minutes later, twisted on my back in a tight crawl space to read a measurement, I realize just how wet and cold and mud-spattered I am. Surveying gives you time to think, I discover—and when you're wedged in a slot underground, time to think is not always a good thing.

"I ask myself if I would do this voluntarily," I say aloud. "The surveying, that is. And I suspect I wouldn't."

Vesely, who is sketching the passage behind me, snickers from the wobbling gloom.

The passage zigs and zags and zigs again, and soon I have an opportunity to enjoy another of the cave surveyor's myriad pleasures. I am standing in eight inches of sucking mud, and I cannot read the tape because it, too, is mud-covered. I swipe it with a muddy thumb, back and forth, with no result. "Lick it," Fortini advises. The mud is cool, grainy, and absolutely without flavor. But the tape is now legible.

After more than an hour we reconnect to a previously surveyed passage, stow the instruments, and meander on. We come upon the rocky shores of a small lake. The water is still, shallow, and perfectly clear. We make a climb that skirts the lake, and at one point I drop left and down into a three-by-three-foot windowed chamber that opens out across the lake like an opera box.



A caver explores Lilburn cave's Enchanted River; below right, pages from Carol Vesely's survey book

sandy shoulder of marble along its edge. Abandoned to the darkness, such features cease in a sense to exist.

My plastic-coated gloves become slick with mud. Ooze penetrates the cuffs, and a grainy fluid trickles down into the fingertips.

We soon arrive at the Great White Pillar, a twenty-foot column of gleaming ivory calcite, or flowstone, in a chamber fifteen minutes from the cave's south entrance. Frantz, Vesely, and others have made frequent trips into Lilburn to clean and repair such formations, muddied or damaged over the years by accident or intent. The need for such active conservation has increased apace with rising traffic through Lilburn and other caves worldwide. We pause to admire the column and then part ways with Frantz and Russo. My group of four continues toward the Schreiber Complex, eager to investigate the climbing lead described on the map. We discover that the climb has been choked by a cave-in, called "breakdown" by cavers. This is not uncommon; breakdown can occur during any stage of

naissance trips into neighboring passages. Vesely is unsure whether a narrow chimney nearby has been explored, and I clamber up it, shinnying with elbows and knees. It is a slender corkscrew of slippery mud, marble, and rippled orange flowstone, and it ends shortly in a tight passage clogged with sand.

We break for a meal at the union of a deep crack—as black as pitch and wide enough to admit a body—and a sandy crawl way. There is no room for us all in the sand, so I seat myself comfortably on a large chockstone wedged in the fissure. I dine on bagels and energy bars, but Fortini has been more resourceful. He assembles a makeshift pizza from ingredients kept warm against his ribs in his cave pack.

After lunch my fellow cavers produce a compass, an inclinometer, and a measuring tape to survey an unmapped section of known passage. Unlike traveling

Page 1 of 4

Cave:	LILBURN	Date Entry:	
Area of Cave (Quad):		Survey Date:	MAY 24, 19
Objectives:	NEAR LAKE ROOM + IMPOSSIBLE DREAM	Survey:	
Sketch/Notes:	CARDL VESELY	Station:	
Instruments:	ROGER MORTIMER	Distance:	
Lead Tape (80):	ART FORTINI	Azimuth:	
Inventory:	ANDREW TOHUNT	Vertical Angle:	
Other:		Left right up down	
Compass Type #			
Date & Time IN:	MAY 24, 19		
Date & Time OUT:			
Notes:			

Page 2 of 4

Station	Distance	Azimuth	Vertical Angle	Left	Right	Up	Down
A1							
A2	8.0	94	-5	2	3	5	2
JN1							
JN2	7.9	329	-5	2	0	10	3/50
JN3	10.2	353	+17	0	25	3.5	2.5
JN4	8.7	84	-27	1	1	8	2
JN5	14.3	334	+1	1	2	7	0/30
JN6	11.5	319	+1	2	0	2	3/30
JN7	4.1	35	+7	25	10	4	14
JN8	6.7	100	-5	2	0	2	5
JN9							

* pre-existing station with no better reading

When eventually we turn back for the surface, Mortimer bows slightly in my direction. "After you," he says. When we enter the Dragon's Teeth Room, despite Vesely's explicit warning I fail to recall it, so jumbled are Lilburn's countless turnings in my memory. I glance tentatively up and into three of the most obvious outlets, and overlook the teeth entirely; they lie in one dim corner, all but brushing the floor. The others wait silently behind me. "I think it's this way," I say finally, obeying my intuition, and start up a climbing passage in the wrong direction.

I make a few additional errors, each politely corrected, before we emerge into a pale night sky. The smell of the woods is astonishingly pungent and sweet. It is nine-fifteen; we have been underground for more than eight hours. After several days in a cave, Vesely tells me, one grows accustomed to the color of artificial light (it is yellow but appears white). When one emerges finally into daylight, the greens and blues of jungle or forest and sky are wondrous, almost hallucinatory, as if the eyes had never before encountered those hues. The ears are startled by birds.

THAT night we gather in the one-room miners' cabin. The cavers are scientists, for the most part, or teachers, and by eleven o'clock I cannot move in the small room without elbowing a Ph.D. in the ribs. We pore over a multi-colored map of Lilburn tacked to the door—there are rooms, passages, and areas of the cave with names like Impossible Dream, Thanksgiving Hall, South Seas, Mousetrack, Mud Heaven, Penthouse, and Bloody Way. As cavers tell stories of caves across the known world, Vesely's son falls asleep in her lap.

"As a girl," Vesely says later, "I was exceptionally shy. I was uncomfortable in crowds. I was a social outsider. I don't think I know any cavers who were ever in the in crowd. A lot of cavers, when they finally find caving, feel that they finally fit in. I can go anywhere in the world and all I have to do is find another caver. I'll call them up and tell them I'm a caver from California, and they'll invite me to their house and let me camp on their floor."

Before Brian's birth Vesely caved three months a year, averaging fifty or six-

ty trips annually. Maternity has cut her caving activity in half.

When Brian was eleven months old, Vesely joined an expedition that linked two lava tubes on the island of Hawaii, thus making them the deepest known cave—at 3,614 feet—in the United States, and the first U.S. cave known to be deeper than 1,000 meters, an international landmark among cavers. Thirteen miles into the trip, as pre-arranged, Vesely left her fellow cavers at an underground campsite, crawled from a side entrance, and drove to a hotel, where her mother-in-law waited with Brian. Vesely stayed the night to nurse the baby and sped back to the underground camp in time for breakfast.

At Lilburn the following day Vesely and half a dozen others burrow for several hours into a pair of congested sinkholes north of the cabin. These sinks, they believe, may one day open into the postulated "Great North Cave," a twin to Lilburn whose existence is suggested by water action on the surface. If the Great North Cave is eventually exposed and linked with known passageways, the total area of navigable cave may be two or three times Lilburn's current dimensions.

In the afternoon Vesely and I join two others, Jeff Cheraz and Mark Scott, for a trip into Lilburn via the north entrance. Standing in our helmets near the entrance—a padlocked gate set into the hillside and invisible from the trail below—we are perceived by a pair of male hikers. The men pause and peer up through the trees.

"Are you guys cavers?" one inquires. There is an uncomfortable silence. No one in the caving party moves. "Is that a cave up there?" the man asks. "We're not at liberty to say," Cheraz says.

The hikers finally move along. Cavers are infamous for this sort of behavior toward outsiders, in part because non-cavers going into caves too often require a rescue—a grueling undertaking in the best of circumstances, and often dangerous to the rescuers. More important, cavers say that they try to thwart non-cavers' access to wild caves because underground environments are so extraordinarily fragile. Of all wilderness areas, caves are by far the easiest to damage and among the most difficult to repair. "People don't realize that one careless moment can destroy a formation hun-

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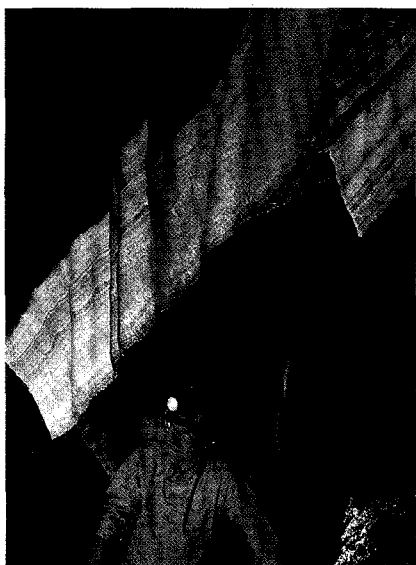
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dreds or thousands of years in the making," Vesely says.

Unsurprisingly, grace of movement underground is the first sign of a skilled caver. "The best caver I have ever seen," Vesely says, referring to the late Philippe Rouiller, of Switzerland, "moved through a cave as if he were floating."

Ducking through the entrance, the four of us descend a cable ladder into a forty-foot vertical pit. While standing at the base of the pit, waiting for the last person to descend, I nearly step backward into a bowl of "cave pearls"—spheres of calcite formed around grains of sand by centuries of gentle agitation in shallow, drip-fed pools. "Watch it!" Scott says, pointing, and I catch myself. But I have very nearly been a case in point.

We inspect a series of climbing leads without success—boot prints in the sand betray that these passages, although unsurveyed, have already been explored. Later, returning to the surface by another route, we arrive at a slender crack that descends between the floor and the wall. Vesely leads, feet first, and as her head slips into the finest part of the crack her helmet catches. She shifts her position slightly, the helmet scrapes through, and she disappears from sight. "Clear," she calls after a moment, and I start down



The Bacon Rind room, in Lilburn

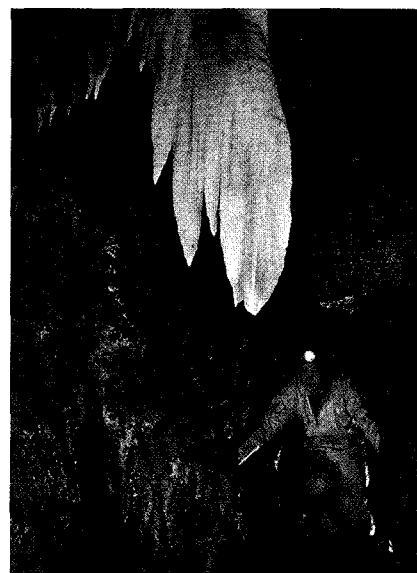
after her. Leaving my pack for last, I slip my boots, legs, and hips easily into the crack. With my arms gripping the slope, my feet pawing gently for small ledges, I slide deeper into the crack and stop short, stuck in a squeeze. I ex-

hale and slide still deeper—but not deep enough. With a sharp thrust of the diaphragm I expel the last breath from my lungs and push again. I inch tighter and stop. In the near darkness, underground, I am pinned by my own doing between two unyielding immensities of stone, incapable of drawing a breath, my legs dangling invisibly, my arms stretched out across the sloping marble. It is fortunate that I am more afraid of open spaces than of tight places. In any case, I can descend no farther. I reach out with my toes, grope for footholds, find them, push myself up and out of the crack, and take a breath. I try again, more circumspectly, and find that if I lean slightly farther to the right, I can slip my torso comfortably through the constriction. I slither downward and emerge beside Vesely in a lower passage. "A squeeze is like a combination lock," she says. "You only need to know the combination."

At caving conventions aboveground cavers often force themselves through adjustable wooden "squeeze boxes" in good-natured competitions. In the safety of these controlled settings cavers may push far beyond what they might hazard underground, and for the remainder of a convention they may wear pins declaring their tightest squeezes, measured to the eighth of an inch. For an adult of normal weight the narrowest possible squeeze generally approximates the distance between the tip of the thumb and the tip of the little finger, spread wide. In men the broadest part of the anatomy is usually the upper torso; women are most commonly arrested by the depth—front to back—of the pelvis. A very slender woman's tightest squeeze may be defined by the width of her skull turned sideways. Some women thus emerge triumphant from squeeze boxes with symmetrical abrasions over their cheekbones. At parties, improvising, some cavers will pass through wire coat hangers bent into rings. I have attempted this unsuccessfully in the privacy of my living room and can report that it is a good deal more difficult than it sounds. Bill Frantz once brought a squeeze box to a junior high school class, and, unsurprisingly, the two smallest girls in the class attained the tightest squeezes. "They were the best at something physical for once," Frantz says, "and they were thrilled."

IN the end we find no virgin passage in Lilburn. Julia's Room is out there but remains buried, perhaps in another cave, on another continent.

On our way out, still deep underground, we pause in a domed chamber



A stalactite known as The Canopy

with a floor of sand. I lay my pack against the wall, stretch out in the cool sand, and rest my helmeted head comfortably against the pack. I turn off my head lamp. During the weekend I have observed cavers who at odd moments did likewise. One minute here, five minutes there, they catnapped while others studied the map or changed the batteries in their lights. Perched on a slab of rock or a stretch of sand, they looked as comfortable as if they were in their own beds. Now Scott joins me, propping his pack against the opposite wall. Vesely and Cheraz disappear down adjacent passages, reconnoitering. The wavering of their lights and the sound of their footsteps grow fainter and fainter and finally vanish. The blackness is absolute. There is no sound but a distant, resonant dripping. My eyes are useless in the colorless void, and after staring at the darkness for a while I close them. Minutes pass. My limbs sink into the sand. After a time I can no longer feel the empty hollow of the chamber around me. I feel nothing but the sensation of incalculable depth and the deliciously protective, all-concealing weight of the darkness, as hard as stone. ☾

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The Voice of Economic Nationalism

Pat Buchanan attacks globalism as a conspiracy of "elites" callously indifferent to the wages and living standards of working families

by Eyal Press

THE GREAT BETRAYAL:

**How American Sovereignty
and Social Justice
Are Being Sacrificed to
the Gods of the Global
Economy**

by Patrick J. Buchanan.
Little, Brown, 376 pages, \$22.95.

IN recent years numerous writers have predicted that the global spread of capitalism will render the notion of economic nationalism obsolete. Yet in American politics globalization may be inducing the opposite effect. Although the American left has traditionally been wary of nationalism, over the past few years an array of progressive organizations, from the AFL-CIO to Ralph Nader's Public Citizen, have charged that globalization is costing America jobs and eroding national health, safety, and environmental laws. At the same time, a network of groups on the normally pro-free-market right, from Republicans for the National Interest (a coalition of voters) to the Manufacturing Policy Project (a think tank headed by H. Ross Perot's former running mate, Pat Choate), now view free trade as a dire threat to American sovereignty. Last year these groups helped to persuade a bipartisan alliance to block President Bill Clinton's bid for so-called fast-track authority on trade legislation. Considering that this nationalist thunder struck in the midst of rapid economic growth, one wonders if a larger storm is on the way.

Patrick J. Buchanan is one of the few American politicians who can legitimately claim to have seen all this coming—and to have played a role in bringing it about. Twice in recent years the pugna-



Illustrations by Barry Blitt

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cious pundit and former aide to Presidents Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan has descended from his throne on *Crossfire*, donned a populist cape, and launched a bid for the Republican nomination on an openly protectionist platform, excoriating both parties for subjecting American workers to the crushing blows of international competition. Buchanan's new book, *The Great Betrayal: How American Sovereignty and Social Justice Are Being Sacrificed to the Gods of the Global Economy*, reads like a campaign manifesto for the year 2000, and opens a window onto Buchananism—and the conservative backlash against free trade—as never before.

What the book exposes will hearten both Buchanan's supporters and his critics, and for the same reason. Supporters—especially blue-collar workers who have lost their jobs to free trade—will thrill to Buchanan's fist-pumping populism: volleys of accusations hurled at the “transnational elites” whom Buchanan blames for nearly every contemporary social ill (inequality, disappearing jobs, “broken homes, uprooted families, vanished dreams, delinquency, vandalism, crime,” you name it). Critics—including most politicians and the great majority of academic economists—will point to Buchanan's overheated claims as proof that like most opponents of free trade, he is a knee-jerk protectionist who simply fails to grasp the complexities of the issue.

In style and cadence *The Great Betrayal* indeed brings to mind the Populist jeremiads that Richard Hofstadter so ably dissected in his 1955 classic, *The Age of Reform*. Hofstadter noted the Populist tendency to substitute apocalyptic, moralizing rhetoric for substantive argument, and to propose solutions to a world gone wrong that were breathtakingly simplistic. *The Great Betrayal* shows these traits, which will unfortunately make it easy to dismiss—unfortunately because, despite the deep flaws in Buchanan's arguments, the contradictions and upheavals of unregulated global capitalism are real. Buchanan's solutions to these problems—stiff tariffs and sharp restrictions on immigration—may not be the answer, but to ignore the problems altogether, as many free-traders have done, is to invite precisely the protectionist backlash that globalization's champions fear.

OF these problems, none is more significant and potentially divisive than globalization's impact on U.S. jobs and wages. In part one of *The Great Betrayal*, Buchanan attempts to show that free trade is turning America into “two nations”: an elite of professionals “prospering beyond their dreams,” and a mass of workers suffering “middle-class anxiety, downsized hopes, and vanished dreams.” The book opens with Buchanan touring Acadia Parish, Louisiana, in the heart of Catholic Cajun country, where a Fruit of the Loom plant recently closed, while the company opened two new factories in Mexico. “Who killed that plant?” Buchanan asks, pointing a finger at “both parties.” To illustrate the need for tariffs, he provides a chart showing that since the early 1970s, as America's duties on imports have fallen, workers' average weekly earnings have plummeted, creating an entire nation of Acadias.

It is a sign of how profoundly free trade is reshaping our politics that Buchanan, himself a former free-trader and a longtime opponent of organized labor, speaks so openly in these pages about America's class divide, quoting the AFL-CIO leader John Sweeney as though Sweeney were an ally. This is especially striking because back in the late 1960s Buchanan penned speeches for the Nixon Administration that explicitly sought to focus middle-class resentment on culture rather than class, inveighing against the elites of the liberal media well before Dan Quayle did. (The strategy culminated in the Republican Party's courtship of the so-called Reagan Democrats—blue-collar voters who identified with the Republicans on such issues as race and abortion.) As the former Republican strategist Kevin Phillips has observed, rising insecurity among America's shrinking middle class has broken up the old marriage of economic and social conservatism, leading anxious workers to search for an alternative to the two major parties, both of which increasingly favor big business and free trade. Buchanan, like Ross Perot and Richard Gephardt, clearly aims to capture this vote, even if it means stitching together strange new alliances. The old Nixonian “Middle American coalition,” he concedes, is shattered: “Within both parties, nationalists are now in

rancorous conflict with the globalists.”

But is Buchanan's picture of a nation of Acadias accurate? Few mainstream economists think so, and Buchanan does little to address their counterclaims. In the 1996 best seller *Pop Internationalism*, for example, the trade theorist Paul Krugman, of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, notes that for all the hype about globalization, imports (other than oil) from low-wage countries in 1990 constituted a mere 2.8 percent of America's economic activity. Technology, not trade, is a chief cause of U.S. wage stagnation, Krugman argues, and imposing tariffs would merely raise prices and foster inefficiency.

This is a serious—though not unassailable—argument, yet Buchanan chooses not even to address it. Instead of dismissing economists as “cloistered academics peddling pet theories,” he might have done more than simply mention in a footnote the work of those economists who echo his concerns. Edward Leamer, for example, a trade theorist at the University of California at Los Angeles, disputes Krugman's focus on the volume of imports from low-wage countries, arguing that as the world economy integrates, a single global market begins to set the same price for all jobs at a particular skill level, causing a sharp drop in American workers' wages even when trade volume is low (in neoclassical theory this is called factor-price equalization). In a series of technical papers on the North American Free Trade Agreement, Leamer has argued that a commitment to free trade could lower the annual wages of unskilled U.S. workers by as much as a thousand dollars. The Harvard economist Dani Rodrik, meanwhile, argues in his new book, *Has Globalization Gone Too Far?*, that economists have severely understated globalization's capacity to undermine the postwar social bargain between workers and employers.

Politically as well as intellectually, such findings are becoming increasingly difficult to dismiss. The Clinton Administration is still reeling from having oversold the virtues of NAFTA, which it claimed would create hundreds of thousands of U.S. jobs without threatening labor or environmental standards. Tellingly, the former Labor Secretary Robert Reich, who supported

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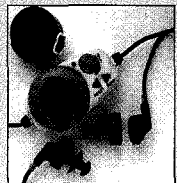
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NAFTA while in office, has recently issued a call for a "new nationalism" that would compensate U.S. workers who lose their jobs to free trade, and would incorporate social safeguards into future trade accords (both Leamer and Rodrik support this approach). Buchanan proposes a very different "new nationalism": 15 percent tariffs on all European goods and even higher rates on products made in developing nations. This seems reckless—vast disruption and higher prices would almost certainly follow. But if the global economy remains unregulated, the appeal of this new protectionism will doubtless grow.

BUCHANAN'S other chief concern about globalization is the threat it poses to national culture and sovereignty, which suggests that for all his newfound interest in class, the core of his politics remains culture. "Tear down the border posts!" he proclaims of the free-trade Pandora's Box. "Throw open America's doors to all who wish to shop here, sell here, move here, live here. Nationality means nothing." Like a number of other right-wing nationalists, including the syndicated columnist Samuel Francis and the paleoconservative Thomas Fleming (the editor of the magazine *Chronicles*), Buchanan views the end of the Cold War as an opportunity to revive the spirit of America First! nationalism that many Republicans embraced half a century ago. During the Cold War, Buchanan championed the internationalism of Henry Kissinger and the "rollback" of communism. Today he calls for an end to foreign aid and hails the "populist-nationalist coalition . . . fixing to dynamite Henry Kissinger's new world order right off the rails."

Echoing the social critic Christopher Lasch, Buchanan excoriates multinational corporations that exhibit no loyalty to community or flag. To him, globalization invites the horrifying prospect of turning nations into undifferentiated shopping malls—"A nation sells its soul for a cornucopia of foreign goods." Politically, he envisions a world in which "nameless, faceless, foreign bureaucrats" at the Geneva-based World Trade Organization are empowered to overturn American laws regarding such things as food safety (although, ironically, Buchanan rarely advocates regulating big

business at home). "The people of a nation," he insists, "are a moral community who must share values higher than economic interest."

Buchanan is right that free-traders have traditionally exalted consumption as a virtually sacred activity, and have glossed over globalization's capacity to erase local cultures and disrupt national norms and values—a theme that pervades Benjamin Barber's insightful book *Jihad vs. McWorld* (which grew out of his March, 1992, *Atlantic* article of the same name). But, as Barber points out, the flip side of pride in local culture is a penchant for resorting to extreme and sometimes exclusionary forms of tribalism.

Buchanan must be careful on this score. If he intends to lead something larger than a right-wing fringe movement, he must convince centrists and progressives that he is not merely an American version of Jean-Marie Le Pen, the French right-wing nationalist whose crude attacks on Arab immigrants have raised the specter of a resurgent neofascism. Buchanan insists that his own "enlightened nationalism" is "not a nationalism that wishes to denigrate or dominate others." Notably absent from *The Great Betrayal* are the inflammatory assertions that peppered Buchanan's 1988 autobiography, *Right From the Beginning* (for example, "promiscuous sodomy—unnatural, unsanitary sexual relations between males . . . is the cause of AIDS"). Buchanan often strikes a tone of distinct moderation, vowing to create a "humane economy" for "black and white, Hispanic and Asian, immigrant and native-born." At the same time, however, he cannot resist complimenting California's stand on Proposition 187, which eliminated all public benefits to illegal immigrants. Elsewhere he hints of Mexico's alleged plans for "La Reconquista" of the southwestern United States, and vows to stop the "annual invasions of millions of illegal aliens" by stationing troops along the U.S.-Mexican border.

To be sure, not all forms of nationalism are ugly and exclusionary. To prove this point, Buchanan takes his readers on a two-century tour of American history. This is a wise move, since today's free-traders do often ignore the lessons of the past—as James Fallows argued convincingly in these pages several years ago

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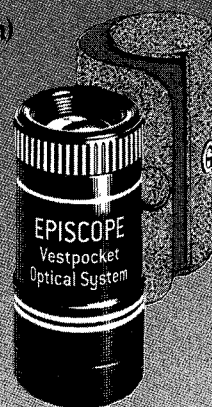
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("How the World Works," December, 1993, *Atlantic*), and as numerous other critics of free trade, from Michael Lind to Alfred Eckes (the economic historian who headed the U.S. International Trade Commission in the 1980s), have said. Few neoclassical economists, these critics have asserted, are willing to face the fact that America, like Great Britain, Germany, and Japan, emerged as a great industrial power through protectionism, not free trade.

Buchanan reiterates this point, but his search for a usable past is marred by a tendency to propagandize. For example, he dismisses free-trade theorists like David Ricardo and John Stuart Mill on the grounds that they weren't Americans. He blames free trade for virtually everything, from the Civil War to the post-Second World War breakup of the traditional American family. Moreover, although Buchanan correctly asserts that the Smoot-Hawley tariff of 1930 did not, as free-traders often claim, cause the Great Depression (the devastating market crash came several months before Smoot-Hawley), he glosses over the fact that protectionism has historically fueled the rise of trade wars and autarchic nationalism, as events of the 1930s attest.

Ultimately, though, the question that hangs over Buchanan's use of the past is whether it is relevant to the present. Buchanan wants a world in which "all cars sold in the USA" are "made in the USA," and he dismisses those "who say there is no turning back" to an earlier age. Yet as he himself notes, fully a third of world trade today consists of transfers between subsidiaries of the same multinational corporations, which suggests a level of global integration that would be difficult if not impossible to undo. Furthermore, the technological changes that have given rise to globalization cannot be erased. Thus it is hard to believe that America's withdrawal from the World Trade Organization and erection of tariff walls would usher in a golden age. In fact, a number of writers, from the *Business Week* columnist Robert Kuttner to the populist author William Greider, argue persuasively that globalization's problems require global, not national, solutions. Nations could, for example, insist that the World Trade Organization define child labor, prison

labor, and the chronic abuse of workers as "unfair trade." Although these writers echo Buchanan's belief that nations have a right to protect their interests against the social consequences of unregulated trade, they advocate that countries work together, not in isolation, to address these problems.

Despite its one-sided arguments and hyperbolic claims, *The Great Betrayal* ought to stir discussion of such alternatives to the free-market internationalist status quo. Contrary to the best hopes of its advocates, the status quo has not extinguished the flames of nationalism but may actually be feeding them. If more of Buchanan's critics don't realize this soon, they may, ironically, end up leaving the stage to Buchanan himself. ☘

More Is Less

by Ralph Lombreglia

THE FALL OF A SPARROW

by Robert Hellenga.
Scribner, 464 pages,
\$25.00.

ROBERT Hellenga's first novel, *The Sixteen Pleasures*, was one of the literary hits of 1994, a highly readable yet sophisticated and surprising book about artistic and sexual passion. Set in 1966–1967, the novel tells the story of Margot Harrington, a twenty-nine-year-old American book conservator who takes a leave from her library job to join the international effort to save the art of Florence after the disastrous flooding of the Arno River.

Margot has three love affairs in the year covered by *The Sixteen Pleasures*, which represent stages of emergence from her chrysalis. The most important affair is with an older man, Alessandro Postiglione, an Italian painting restorer. Margot discovers a rare medieval erotic book in the Florentine convent where she is staying, and she and Sandro (as he's known) go on to act out most of the "sixteen pleasures" depicted in its explicit

plates, as we move through a well-spun and suspenseful story in which that erotic text becomes a talisman for Margot, a magical object, a personal and professional obsession and a key to her identity.

HELLENGA'S new novel, *The Fall of a Sparrow*, reads like *The Sixteen Pleasures* writ large—very large. It labors strenuously to carry the weight of self-conscious literary seriousness. All the preoccupations of the first novel are in evidence again, but this time with the number of plot elements literally tripled and the main character saddled with enough grief and confusion to befuddle a demigod. *The Fall of a Sparrow* is premised on the least auspicious element imaginable—the gruesome, violent, early death of a man's daughter—and then the book's many pages present a baroque elaboration of a theme that, lest we miss it, is overtly stated at the end: the taste of death need not spoil life.

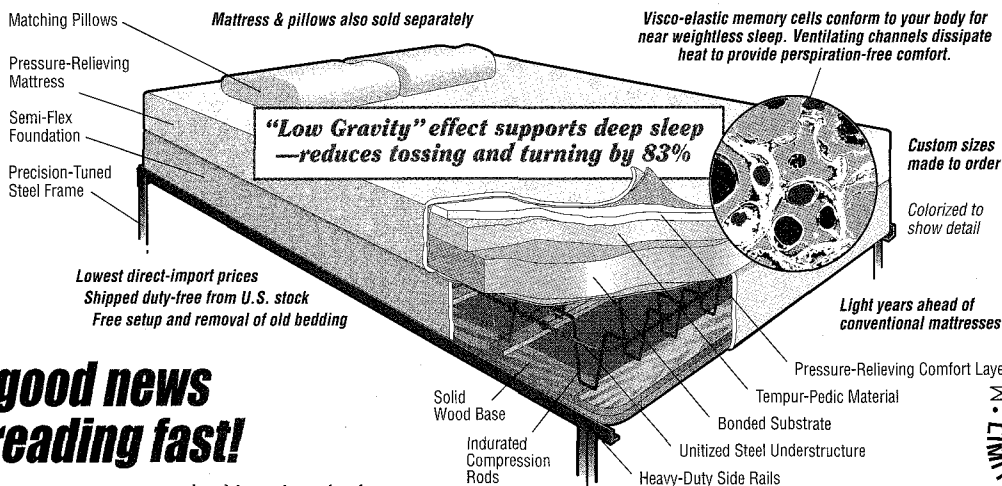
The title *The Fall of a Sparrow* could refer to almost anyone or anything in the book, but the titular sparrow for the most part seems to be a twenty-two-year-old American woman named Carolyn ("Cookie") Woodhull, who was one of scores of casualties of the 1980 terrorist bombing of a train station in Bologna, where she had just arrived to study international law after an undergraduate career at Harvard. Her death took place about six years before the opening of the novel, which is primarily about her father, Alan ("Woody") Woodhull, a middle-aged classics professor at a place called St. Clair College, in Illinois.

Woody's emotional life stopped when Cookie died. Though he has carried on nobly in the years since, raising his remaining two daughters alone after his wife's breakdown and retreat into a nunnery, teaching his students with the only passion he can muster (intellectual passion for the classics), he has not really been alive. He has not, for one thing, been intimate with a woman since returning to America after Cookie's death. The admirable and artistically serious project of *The Fall of a Sparrow* is to depict Woody's entry into his "*vita nuova*."

The doorway into that new life is, oddly enough, a guitar. On his way back from an impulsive trip to attend a Harvard memorial service for Cookie and two other deceased members of her class

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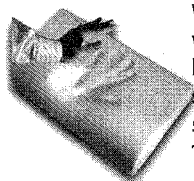
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The world is much focused on the developments in Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") and the Gaza Strip, in which, for the most part, Israel has relinquished sovereignty and authority to the Palestinian Authority (P.A.). Ninety-eight percent of the Arabs in these territories live now under the rule of the P.A. There is some question whether or not they are better off than before. But many believe that Arabs in Israel itself are a "persecuted minority."

What are the facts?

Israel is a Democratic Country. Israel is an open, pluralistic, and egalitarian society. Different religions, cultures, and social traditions coexist. Protection of such diversity is embedded in Israel's traditions and confirmed by the government. About 20% of the population (over one million people) are non-Jews, most of them Arabs, and some Druze. Like all other Israeli citizens, they have full rights to vote and to hold elective office. Both Arabs and Druze hold seats the Knesset, the Israeli parliament. Every Knesset, since the founding of the State in 1948, has had Arab and Druze members. All transactions in the Knesset are simultaneously translated into Arabic, and Arab members may address the Knesset in Arabic.

It is official policy of the Israeli government to foster the language, culture, and traditions of the Arab minority, in the educational system and in daily life. Arabic is an official language in Israel, together with Hebrew. Israel's Arabic press is the most vibrant and independent of any country in the region. There are more than 20 Arabic periodicals. They publish what they please, subject only to the same military censorship as Jewish publications. There are daily TV and radio programs in Arabic. Arabic is taught in Jewish secondary schools. Israeli universities are renowned centers of learning in the history and literature of the Arab Middle East.

Education and literacy of the Arab population in Israel is as high as and probably higher than in any Arab country. The literacy rate among Israeli Arabs is 95%, virtually the same as for Israeli Jews. There are close to 1,000 Arab educational institutions in Israel, with about 300,000 students—just about 25 times as many as in 1948, when the State of Israel was created,

Ninety percent of Arab children attend school, probably the highest ratio of any Arab population anywhere. Israeli universities and technical institutions are freely available to the Arabs. About 5,000 Arab students attend such schools.

Israeli Arabs Enjoy Full Equality in Law and in Fact. All religious communities in Israel enjoy the full protection of the State. Israeli Arabs—Moslems, as well as many Christian denominations—are free to exercise their faiths, to observe their own weekly day of rest and holidays, and to administer their own internal affairs. Each community has its own religious councils and courts, and has full jurisdiction over religious affairs, including matters of personal status, such

as marriage and divorce. The holy sites of all religions are administered by their own authorities and protected by the government. In contrast to the non-Israeli Arab world, Arab women in

"Contrary to propaganda...the Arabs in Israel enjoy every civil right and have the same status under law as Jewish Israelis."

Israel enjoy the same status as men. Israeli law grants women equal rights, including the right to vote and to be elected to public office, prohibits polygamy, child marriage, and the barbarity of female sexual mutilation. It has thus vastly changed the status of women, to far above that of any country in the region. Israeli health standards are by far the highest in the Middle East. Israeli health institutions are freely open to all Arabs, on the same basis as they are to Jews.

There is, however, one difference between the "rights" of Arabs and Jews in Israel. Israeli and Druze men are required to do three years of military service and then serve one month every year until they are 50. Arabs are exempted from military duty and are not required to perform any compensating civilian service. Since the surrounding Arab states, with the exceptions of Egypt and recently of Jordan, are the avowed enemies of Israel and are dedicated to its destruction, this exemption is granted by the Israeli government to its Arab citizens, so as to spare them conflicts of loyalty and conscience.

Contrary to propaganda and to what many believe, the Arabs in Israel are full-fledged citizens, enjoy every civil right, and have the same status in law as Jewish Israelis. In summary, they enjoy the highest standards of living and liberty of any Arabs in the Middle East. It is instructive and sobering to compare the condition of the approximately one million Arabs in Israel with that of the pitiful remnants of Jewry in Arab countries. Jews have been living in Arab countries for almost 2,000 years. Under Arab dominance, they were always third-class citizens and subject to harassment and persecution. There were about 900,000 Jews in Arab countries in 1946—now there are fewer than 25,000. But there are now over one million Arabs in Israel, as against 150,000 in 1948—an almost seven-fold increase. These figures alone would seem to prove that things can't be all that bad for Arabs in Israel.

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8b

(a trip arranged by the author primarily to have Woody learn that his daughter did not go to her grave a virgin), Woody—a certifiable blues-music nut as well as a scholar of antiquity—stops in a music store in Ann Arbor and finds a rare and expensive National Steel guitar, the kind of gleaming silvery-metal guitar that Paul Simon mentions in his famous song "Graceland" ("The Mississippi Delta was shining like a National guitar"). At the utterly extravagant price of \$8,500, the guitar represents an irrational but redemptive decision for the hero. Once he buys it, the guitar becomes the emblem of his transformation, much like Margot's erotic book in *The Sixteen Pleasures*.

The distinct difference, though, is that Margot's unearthed treasure relates directly to elements at the core of that novel. Even more significant, Margot's book is a pivotal dramatic device, engendering the plot that acts out the transformation of her life. Woody's fancy guitar, seemingly so full of gleaming hubris, does not function in that pivotal way. The detailed attention that Hellenga devotes to guitar lore and blues music grows tedious—not because it isn't interesting or well presented (it usually is) but because it continually keeps the author from tending to his core dramatic business. Unfortunately, much the same must be said for many other structural elements of this ambitious but too complicated novel.

As in *The Sixteen Pleasures*, sexuality is a major preoccupation in *The Fall of a Sparrow*. Right after Woody gets his new guitar, one of his most talented students decides to make her own transition into a new life by seducing him. But this headstrong young woman, Turi Mirsadiqi, is not just any student; she's the daughter of Woody's first lover from his undergraduate days, Allison, who is now married to a spectacularly wealthy Iranian businessman, Alireza Mirsadiqi, who is in turn about to become a major benefactor of the college where Woody teaches. We eventually learn that Allison was one of the last friends to see Cookie alive (the Mirsadiqis live in Rome, and they put her on that train to Bologna), and that when Woody rushed to Italy after the bombing, he repeatedly made love with Allison while Cookie lay in the morgue and his own wife lost her mind. Now, of

course, by committing this shameless betrayal of both Allison and her powerful husband, Woody is moving beyond a merely unusual adultery into the violation of near mythic taboo. What's even stranger is that he does so in a largely passive and detached emotional state, with much intellectualized self-scrutiny and blues-guitar picking, but almost no compunction or misgivings.

IF this summary (and it doesn't cover half the book's contents) leaves you wondering whether *The Fall of a Sparrow* is sex farce or updated Greek tragedy, the answer is that it's by turns both and neither and several other things besides.

Woody's connection to the Mirsadiqi family is the real heart of the novel's dramatic conflict, but it's also the occasion of a most peculiar inattention to dramaturgy on Robert Hellenga's part. Whether a novelist is writing a farce, a tragedy, or anything else, he cannot create a story in which the hero has illicit sex with both the wife and the daughter of an Iranian multimillionaire (the wife being also one of the hero's oldest friends) and not realize that this sexual tangle is going to upstage every other element of the book. Readers are going to stare fixedly at it, waiting for the delicious unraveling.

Yet Hellenga seems not to have felt the dramatic demands of his own creation. *The Fall of a Sparrow* asks readers to accept its unlikely but riveting premise and then keeps them waiting interminably for the other shoe to drop. Meanwhile, the author seems more interested in his story's various literary precedents and analogues, or in subplots so elaborate and distracting that they should have been novels in their own right. Add to all this Hellenga's narrative tic of repeatedly leading readers to expect particular scenes and then skipping past those scenes to offer instead a summary of what happened, and you have a dramaturgy that could clear most theaters by intermission. One wants to say what the kingly and forgiving Alireza Mirsadiqi says when—in a magical though oddly superfluous scene in a helicopter—he at long last confronts Woody about sleeping not only with his wife but with his daughter as well: “You have gone where I cannot follow you.” Or what Woody's Italian lover, Gabriel-

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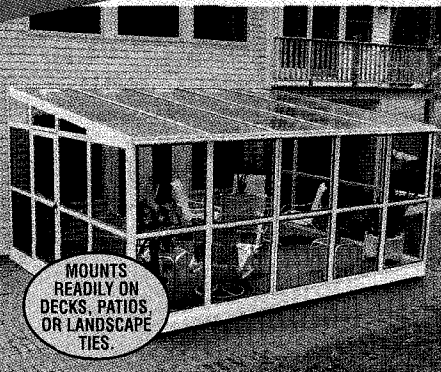
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la, says about the overuse of parmigiano-reggiano by certain Italian cooks: *Basta*. Enough.

"Purity of heart is to will one thing," Kierkegaard wrote. I thought of that aphorism a number of times while reading *The Fall of a Sparrow*, because the book wills so many things. And "wills" is the word. To return to Hellenga's beloved guitar for a moment: the most emotionally convincing guitar music is usually also the most "guitaristic," in which the fingerings lie most naturally on the fretboard, the anatomy of the human hand relating nicely to the layout of the instrument. Watching a good guitarist play, especially a blues guitarist, one is struck by how little the fingers move in relation to the amazing sounds that result. If the player gets into the neck position best suited for what is being played, everything necessary is right under the hand. The fingers don't have

to contort unnaturally, or stretch all over the fretboard, or play too many notes in an attempt to compensate for a lack of emotional power.

Robert Hellenga is a unique literary guitarist with a fascinating mind, but in *The Fall of a Sparrow* we encounter that mind too directly, at the expense of our immersion in the music. *The Sixteen Pleasures* was an artful and sexy novel about art and sex, a book that seduced readers with a good story, an ingratiating voice, and a surprising (but relevant) knowledge of everything from the workings of big-time art auctions to the physical chemistry of painting restoration to the emotional chemistry of human longing. *The Fall of a Sparrow* contains plenty of art and sex and knowledge too, but in this book Robert Hellenga allowed himself, rather than us, to be seduced by his own fecundity of invention. ☼

BRIEF REVIEWS



The Cats of Lamu

by Jack Couffer,
photographs by Jack and Mike Couffer.
Lyons Press, 168 pages, \$24.95.

Lamu is a small archipelago off the coast of Kenya, once an important point in the trade from Africa to the East. When Mr. Couffer came upon it, the place was a beautiful backwater inhabited by fishermen, mostly Muslim, and cats, possibly descended from those revered in old Egypt. These feral cats are slim, with long legs and tails, and have been recognized as a distinct breed. Mr. Couffer took to studying them, but could not maintain the detachment proper to an animal behaviorist. The group—he calls it a pride—close to his house offered such a variety of conduct and such distinctive faces that the members acquired names like Ink Spot and Midnight, Lady Gray and Kinky. Neighbor-

ing, less polished tribes included Ugly and Captain Hook. Mr. Couffer discovered—and describes with a mixture of precision and sly humor—territories, social ranks, protocol, family connections, and communication systems among his cats. He warns that "the price one pays to play at studying cats is high," for he has trespassed over garden walls, has leaped out of the way of a battle, and once had to "spend half the night watching cats sniffing urine." His report on Lamu and its cats is charmingly written but ultimately a bit sad, for modern improvements and the tourist trade have encroached on the area. Meddlesome off-islanders propose to bring the feline citizens to order with a neutering campaign, regardless of the fact that those citizens have kept their own order for centuries and have cleaned the streets as well. The photographs are numerous and handsome.

The Odd Sea

by Frederick Reiken.
Harcourt Brace, 201 pages,
\$22.00.

Mr. Reiken's novel can be considered a coming-of-age story, but it is unusual, and unusually interesting, because his adolescent narrator is much less self-centered than most of his kind. Philip Shumway's multi-talented, admired, even adored older brother, Ethan, has walked down the driveway and vanished. Philip does not record only his own grief and bewilderment. He observes, and tries to understand, the reactions of his parents, sisters, and friends—including a patroness at the neighboring art colony. He tries to reconstruct Ethan's activities before his disappearance. He learns a lot, and so does the reader, although the question of the position and effect of art and artists remains metaphorical and as unanswerable as it has always been. The members of the Shumway family become thoroughly real people as they cling together while coping with their loss in highly divergent ways. The novel is set in a small town in western Massachusetts, with the weather and look of that hill country most effectively described. The opening episode will stir the blood of anyone who has ever had the luck to encounter perfect skating conditions on wild ice. The book is a first novel, skillful and much more than promising.

Hen Frigates: Wives of Merchant Captains Under Sail

by Joan Druett.
Simon & Schuster, 274 pages,
\$25.00.

A hen frigate was a commercial vessel with the captain's wife, and possibly children, aboard. Ms. Druett has assembled a great deal of information about the seagoing women, and it is surprising. Some captains taught their ladies to navigate, for the practical reason that there was often nobody else aboard who knew how to do it. In emergency wives, and in one case a daughter, brought ships safely to port. Boredom and isolation were the enemies in good weather, combated by sewing, fancywork,

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Guidelines. a. G + RAPH(S) (sharp anag.); J(AMP)ACK b. BA(CO)N; R + AIT + RAPS c. BA(S)IL; MA + TRI(C)ES d. TOS(TA-DA)S; BOW + IE e. POW + DE(R)ED; OK + A + PI f. ST(A)IRS; JEEPERS (pun) Across 1. L + EARN 2. DI + APERS (pears anag.) 3. S(AD + IS)T 4. R(AT)INGS 5. (I)AB(BE)S 6. AL(A) + MO 7. S(P)OUSES 8. SPA + R + ROW 9. (F)LYING 10. SANTA (hidden) 11. C(H)UB'S 12. V + I + PER 13. R(ESP)ITE 14. E + BONY 15. PE + TRA (rat anag.) 16. SE(X)ES 17. TRI-TON (pun) 18. GO(LIAT)H (rev.) Down. 1. ST(U)ARTS 2. GR + APPLE 3. R(U)P(E)E(d) 4. N + YLON (only anag.) 5. HARP + I(E)S 6. NADIRS (anag.) 7. RE(B)ELS 8. A + BAT + E 9. H + ARTS 10. GIMLET (anag. minus e) 11. GRIP(P)ED 12. CAT + ALP + A 13. SIEGE (anag.) 14. PRO + VO(w) 15. SMELT (double def.) 16. GO + SHAW + K 17. BU(O)YS 18. TIED UP (anag.)

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reading, and writing letters and journals. Those last items have been a fine source of detail for Ms. Druett, revealing, among other things, that all sailors could sew and some were expert embroiderers. The text is organized around topics rather than people, which makes it difficult to follow the activities of a gaudy character like Shotgun Murphy, but in general the system works well and casts light on an odd corner of nineteenth-century life.

Beyond Recall

by Robert Goddard.
Holt, 310 pages, \$25.00.

Mr. Goddard's mystery novel is the type in which a rich and unpleasant old coot is murdered in the library and the police must sift through the heirs for the culprit—but with a difference. Great Uncle Joshua is a very likeable old coot; he is not murdered in the library or even on the premises; and the police do a poor job of sifting. An amateur—himself one of the heirs—has to tackle the case years later. The book has a large cast of characters, not always efficiently controlled by the author, and some dubious motivation, but no shortage of action.

Cursed Days: A Diary of Revolution

by Ivan Bunin,
translated by Thomas Gaiton Marullo.
Ivan R. Dee, 286 pages,
\$28.50.

Bunin (1870–1953) was among the last Russian writers of upper-class origin. His family were landowners and, until emancipation, serf owners. Bunin knew village peasant life more closely than did the liberal urban intellectuals who acclaimed the merits of the "folk." The folk, in Bunin's opinion, were ignorant, gullible, violent, dirty, and totally unfit to take a hand in government. The revolution of 1917 horrified him. As a writer, however, he could not resist keeping notes on what he observed. He published the notebook—in exile—in 1936, but it has never before been translated into English. Thomas Gaiton Marullo, an authority on Bunin and his times, has done an admirable job as both translator and editor, providing footnotes that explain what was really going on, as opposed to the rumors recorded by Bunin,

which were mostly false. Bunin's text depicts contrasts: Enthusiasts hailing the revolution and promising death to the bourgeoisie, and anti-Bolsheviks applauding the Whites in the safety of private quarters. Streets patrolled by armed thugs, usually bowlegged and munching sunflower seeds, and quiet citizens dreaming of help from the French or the Germans. Everybody hungry and cold, but audiences gathering to hear Bunin's anti-revolutionary lectures. Bunin's despair over the destruction of his country is moving—he truly suffered—and his prophecies of a disastrous future were often correct, while his blunt contempt for anyone not of his own well-bred class is an inadvertent explanation for some of the Bolshevik excesses that he deplored. As both a human document and a historical record, this book deserves attention.

Will This Do?

by Auberon Waugh.
Carroll & Graf, 288 pages,
\$24.00.

Mr. Waugh's autobiography will presumably do for admirers of his novels; avid devotees of his father, Evelyn; confirmed Anglophiles; and all who enjoy the sound of names, notable or not, dropping like autumn leaves.

—Phoebe-Lou Adams

Recent books by Atlantic authors:

The Human Christ: The Search for the Historical Jesus, by Charlotte Allen. The Free Press, 400 pages, \$26.00. A portion of this book appeared, in somewhat different form, as *The Atlantic's* cover story in December of 1996.

Plenty of Nothing: The Downsizing of the American Dream and the Case for Structural Keynesianism, by Thomas L. Palley. Princeton, 238 pages, \$27.95. This book grew out of an article titled "The Forces Making for an Economic Collapse," which was part of *The Atlantic's* cover subject in July of 1996, "Recipe for a Depression."

Off the Beaten Path, edited by Joseph Barbato and Lisa Weinerman Horak. Farrar Straus & Giroux/North Point Press, 262 pages, \$24.00. "The Half-Skinned Steer," by E. Annie Proulx, one of the stories in this anthology, first appeared in *The Atlantic*, last November.



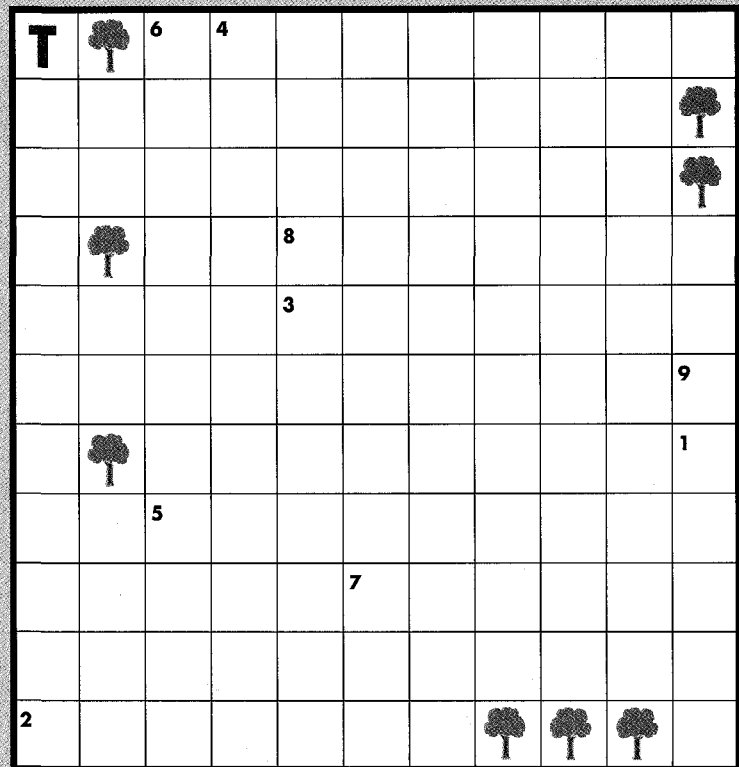
THE PUZZLER

by Emily Cox and Henry Rathvon

Nine-Hole Course

The diagram represents a golf course, and each clue answer represents one shot. Players begin at the tee in the upper-left corner and proceed toward the first hole (marked 1). Each shot is a straight line entered in the grid left, right, up, down, or on a diagonal, and each new shot begins in the square where the last one stopped. The hole marked 1 is thus the tee-off square for the sequence of shots approaching 2, and so on. Do not shoot *through* a numbered hole; and please avoid the trees. It may help to remember that each set of clues is numbered for the hole *toward* which it is proceeding. Answers include seven capitalized words; 3c is a bit outdated; 7a and 8a are not in everyday use.

The solution to last month's Puzzler appears on page 105.



Clues

- 1a. Drive hit in confidence . . . (6)
- 1b. . . . over most of the long grass off the fairway (7)
- 1c. Going around tree, the shot calls for a hard hat (6)
- 1d. Cross shooter with putter (6)
- 1e. Feel sorry about missing the first birdie? (5)
- 2a. Scores for everyone involved in links (7)
- 2b. A putt's rolling around golfer's rear boot? (5,2)
- 2c. One more LPGA lunatic's incipient remarks (11)
- 3a. Story by one in the debut of *Tin Cup* (5)
- 3b. Clinton, with first of clubs he left next to water (7)
- 3c. A quartet heard previously (5)
- 3d. In hesitation, a mistake brings about a flap? (7)
- 3e. Tentatively explore cost with lummoX (4,3)
- 4a. Chirac's very small toupee piece (5)
- 4b. Signal for quiet before a mallard's first quack (4)
- 4c. Old manor remodeled in English countryside (8)
- 5a. People who predict improved drive-ins (8)
- 5b. Starlets taking the odds with an experienced sailor (4)
- 5c. Contractual arrangements for the emptied rooms (5)
- 5d. Cattle drive (5)
- 5e. Spool of line for an angler's redfish? (4)
- 6a. Our lies could be worse (7)
- 6b. Holler, making HR wave (6)
- 6c. Runs and screams and smells like a skunk (5)
- 6d. "Son, a thing that will make you older and wiser . . ." (5)
- 6e. A computer's memory stuff (3)
- 7a. One of the Furies, big-time? (7)
- 7b. Painting of topless trollop (3)
- 7c. More than one topic appears to someone with a lisp? (6)
- 8a. Letter in Hebrew from previously mentioned pair of churchmen (6)
- 8b. The lady's right address in Bonn (4)
- 8c. Indian name rendered in Dravidian (4)
- 9a. An outcast from Islam, he cracked up (7)
- 9b. Dixie general in conversation with *Gone With the Wind* star (5)
- 9c. Listen to toccata's beginning and middle (5)

Note: The instructions above are for this month's puzzle only. It is assumed that you know how to decipher clues. For a complete introduction to clue-solving, send an addressed, stamped long envelope to The Atlantic Puzzler, 77 North Washington Street, Boston, Mass. 02114.

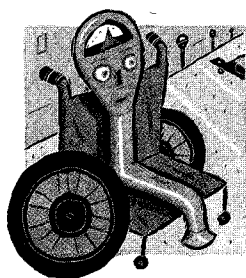
WORD COURT

by Barbara Wallraff

At the university where I work, the head of services for students with disabilities informed me that HANDICAPPED PARKING was misused to refer to parking reserved for those with handicaps, since the term "obviously" meant that the parking space had a disability. I claimed that English formed compounds like this all the time. She said not. Naturally, in the heat of the moment I was not able to think of examples. Can you give me some?

Robert S. Wachal
Iowa City, Iowa

Black colleges? An Italian neighborhood? The poor house? Handicapped is an adjective that is regularly used as a substantive, or noun—a completely normal practice. Think of the adjectives



in "Give me your tired, your poor . . ." But when you put this noun-with-the-form-of-an-adjective in front of another substantive (*parking*), it starts looking

like an adjective again. This is a quirk inherent in how our language goes together, but you're quite right that the phrase isn't wrong. Actually, I was relieved to see that your head of services wasn't agitating for signs that read *PHYSICALLY CHALLENGED PARKING*. Perhaps the tide of political correctness has turned.

I have noticed the increasing use of reticent in situations where I believe reluctant is intended. The gardening section of our local paper recently featured this headline: "FIG TREES PRODUCE BUMPER CROPS; RHODODENDRONS RETICENT TO BLOOM." I understand reticence as a reluctance to speak. One is reticent on a subject or one is reluctant to discuss it. Please help.

Tatiana Granoff
Los Altos, Calif.

I'm with you. The time-honored meaning of *reticent* is indeed "quiet" or "reserved"; someone can be *reticent*, period, and really oughtn't to be reticent to do anything at all. But the assertion that a person is *reluctant* cries out for more information—*reluctant* to do what?

I must admit that the current, third edition of *The American Heritage Dictionary* gives "reluctant" as one of the meanings of *reticent*. However, previous editions did not. It's hard to see what's gained if the two words come to have the same meaning, and easy to see what's lost. Thus I am *reluctant* to accept the shift in meaning—and not *reticent* about saying so.

I frequently hear educated people talking about "a limited amount of seats" or "a large amount of dollars." An inner voice immediately retorts, "number of . . ." Am I being haunted by the ghost of usage past?

Ed Brody
Hastings-on-Hudson, N.Y.

If it is a ghost of the past, the past isn't over! Choosing between *amount*, which is to say overall size of pool or heap, and *number*, or how many, can on occasion be tricky: "the *amount* of bacteria in the sample" or "the *number* of bacteria in the sample"? In some contexts either choice can sound wrong. For those occasions it's worth remembering that *quantity* can mean either thing and is a good substitute for both.

Help is needed on the word *which*. You sometimes hear or read a sentence like this: "I'd buy that new car if I were rich, which I'm not." This seems clearly wrong; *which* has no antecedent, and but would work better, assuming you need the final phrase at all, *which* you don't. What is bothering me about this? Some-



how I think this construction is not rigorous standard English.

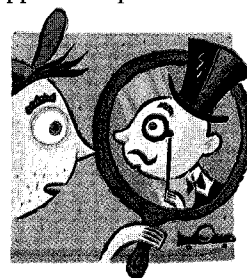
Thomas Ioppolo
Oak Park, Ill.

What ought to be bothering you is exactly what you mention: *which*, a relative

pronoun, ought to be referring back to an antecedent noun, which in this case doesn't exist. The word is trying to refer back to the adjective *rich* (and in your "which you don't" it is trying to refer back to a verb along with its object), but grammatically that's not allowed, except colloquially. As you suggest, though, *but*—or *though* or *as*—would be fine.

A common variant on this problem is the likes of "I really need a new car, *which* annoys me," in which an entire clause is meant to be the antecedent for *which*. As a general rule, that's not allowed either. *This*, *that*, and *it*, however, being demonstrative pronouns, do not need specific antecedents, and may refer back to clauses; one may say "I really need a new car, and *this* [or *that* or *it*] annoys me."

Not even these formulas will work, however, if there's any ambiguity about what *this*, *that*, or *it* is supposed to be. For example, suppose the previous sentence had begun, "Not even *this* will work if there's any ambiguity . . ." Readers could be expected to wonder, What's *this*? Where there isn't obviously one and only one answer to the question, a noun referring back (like *formulas*) is probably needed.



Have you recently had a language dispute that you would like this column to resolve? Write to Word Court in care of *The Atlantic Monthly*, 77 North Washington Street, Boston, MA 02114, or send E-mail to MsGrammar@TheAtlantic.com. All letters become the property of Word Court.



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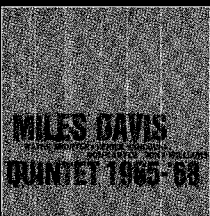
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